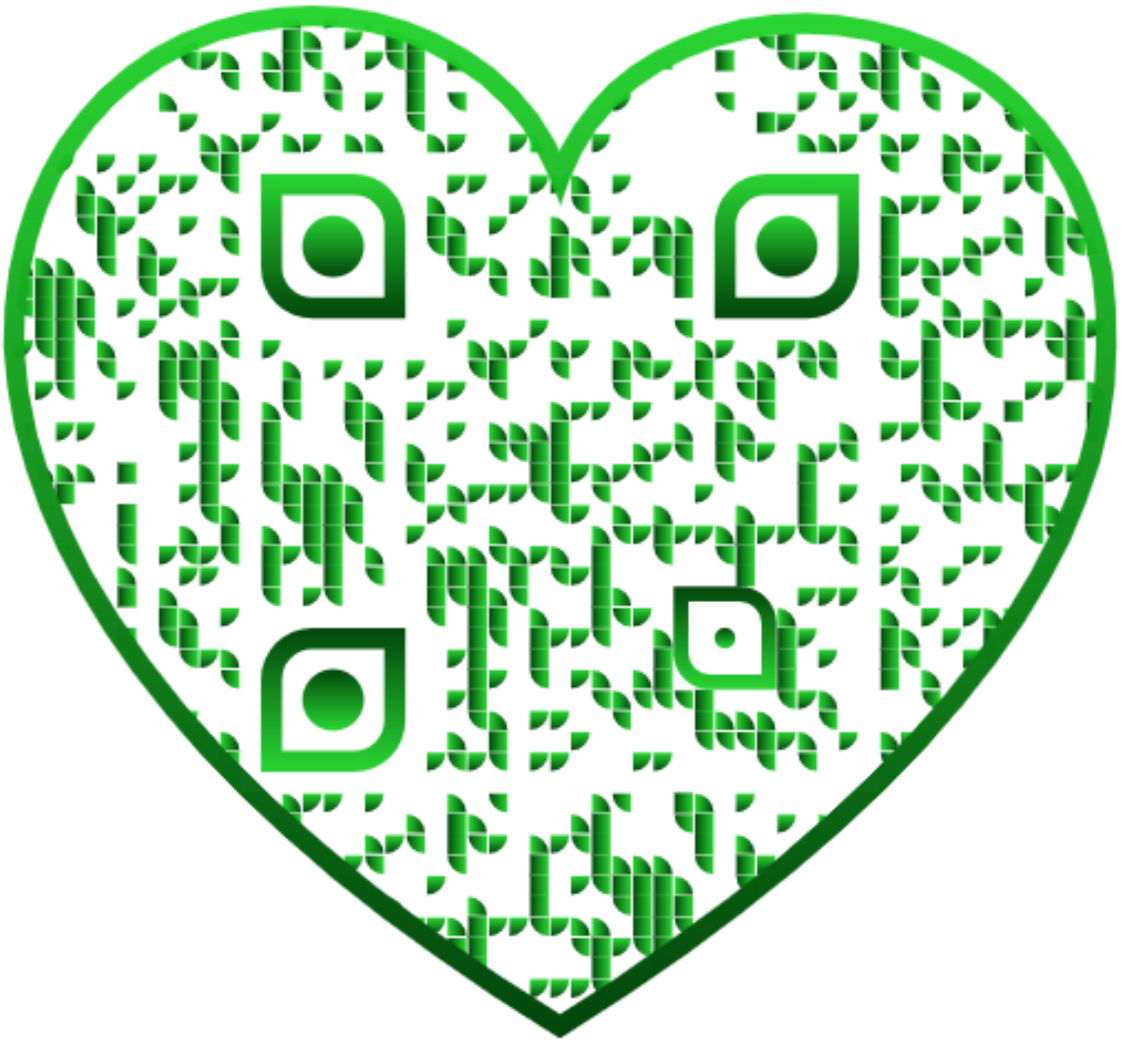

THE
ARK OF THE COVENANT:

ILLUSTRATIVE OF
GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS PEOPLE.

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Introduction.

AMONG the material objects which constituted the appliances of the Levitical system, special prominence was ever given to THE ARK. Its construction *w*as the first thing enjoined on Moses, when, on Sinai's mount, he received ceremonial precepts, and was entrusted with the pattern of whatsoever would be needful for the maintenance of the Jewish worship. According to the author of the book of Cozri, "the ark, with the mercy-seat and cherubim, was the foundation, root, heart, and marrow of the whole temple, and all the ritual worship performed therein." It was made, as it were, the central and cardinal point. It was that, for the sake *of,*and in connection with which all else was appointed. The tabernacle was to shelter it; the veil, to screen it. On it (or beside it) was the blood of the atoning victim to be annually sprinkled; and before it was the sweet incense to be waved. Thither was the voice of prayer directed, and thence were heavenly responses vouchsafed. In the story of the Israelitish wanderings, it occupies a conspicuous place; and in the narrative of Canaan's conquest, we find it again in the foreground. Consistently and continuously is it presented to our view, as an object of deepest importance and significance.

Numerous have been the theories entertained concerning its precise intention; and many the speculations as to what it was designed to teach, or what it was meant to foreshadow. Some theologians, for example, have explained it as an emblem of the throne of God in heaven; some, as a figure of heaven itself; some, as an image of Paradise; some, as a memorial of the cherubic banishment of man from Eden; some, as a type of Christ; and others, as a prefigurement of the church. The simplest and most ordinarily received interpretation, and that which seems to meet every requirement alike for critical and practical purposes, is that which regards the ark as having been *a material symbol and accompaniment of God's residence on earth.* It is under this aspect that we propose to trace its interesting and eventful history,---each differing phase presenting us with an affirmative answer to the question, "Will God in very deed dwell with men?" and each affording some new illustration of man's duty as arising out of God's wondrous condescension.

There may appear to some a lack of typological reference in the ensuing

pages. This has resulted in part from a desire to dwell rather on the obvious and primary, than on the hidden and prefigurative teachings of the ark and of its story; as well as in part from a dread of substituting fancy for fact, and mistaking mere analogies for intended adumbrations. It is true, that, in roving through the nursery plantations whence this little plot has gained some valuable stock, it is possible to have overlooked some healthy shoot, which would have taken in a kindly manner to the soil, and might have yielded its produce of refreshing verdure and of wholesome fruit. But, on the other hand, it is unquestionable, that it was needful to be guarded in the selection, now passing by what appeared of doubtful worth, and now pruning what seemed to have budded with undue luxuriance.

For exposition, this theme is attended with many difficulties; for meditation, it is replete with stores of valuable thought. Our aim will be, in the main, to deal with the former only so far as shall be needful to subserve the latter, and with the latter, as it naturally flows from the former, thus avoiding profitless speculations on the one hand, and discursive reflections on the other. May the God of the ark, the God of the covenant, manifest Himself to the writer and to the readers of this volume, as He does not unto the world; and in the study of His dealings with the chosen tribes, may He enable us to discern the footsteps of that grace wherewith He still visits His people, and tabernacles in the midst of His gospel-church.

Chapter 1 - The Design of the Ark; or, God's Presence Vouchsafed

THE DESIGN OF THE ARK;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE VOUCHSAFED.

THEY shall make an ark of shittim wood," was the charge confided to the Jewish legislator. There was no possibility of his misconstruing the order. His mind would never revert for a moment to such an ark as that in which, when an infant, he had been upborne on the watery bosom of the Nile, nor to that larger vessel wherein Noah had been preserved amid the ravages of a world-destroying flood. The Hebrew language was free from the ambiguity with which, in this case, our own is chargeable. The words*Tebah* and *Aron* alike denote a coffer; but the former is uniformly applied to such as are adapted for floating, while the latter term is reserved to designate an ordinary box. The coffin or mummy-chest of Joseph (Gen. 1. 26), and the collecting-box or money-chest of Jehoiada (2 Kings xii. 9, 10), are instances in which a simple covered receptacle, of some sort or shape, is indicated by the same word which was used to express the ark Moses was ordered to construct.

That such a command should be given, would in no wise astonish him. The use of a sacred shrine was very common in the land, where the son of Amram had received his early training. Plutarch and Apuleius tell us, that, in Egyptian processions, there was a Kistophorus, or chest-bearer, who carried a box containing their most precious mysteries; and modern researches have thrown much light on these ancient customs. Sir J. G. Wilkinson describes the mode in which the shrine and its stand were carried by means of staves passing through metal rings, and supported on the shoulders;---the position of these in boats, where a veil was often drawn across for the purpose of concealment;---and the overshadowing of the whole with figures of winged sphinxes, corresponding to the cherubim of the Jews.

While, however, it is among the antiquities of Egypt that we meet with this

close affinity to the external construction of the ark, we also find traces, more or less faint, of a like usage diffused throughout the globe. The Greeks and Romans had their c*istæ,* wherein were enclosed the most costly appendages of their idolatry. The *kist-vaens* of the Druids, consisting (as the very name literally imports) of *stones* disposed in the form of a *chest,* though often interpreted as traditionary relics of the ark of Noah, convey to the eye far more readily the idea of their having been designed as rude representations of a dwelling place for Deity. When the edifice form has been lost, the mystic coffer has still conveyed the same latent teaching,---the ordinary basket being occasionally represented on the medals of ancient nations, but with a figure of "the serpent or good demon" either entering it, or peering out of it. At the harbor of Owharre, in Hushine, some of the earlier explorers of the South Seas discovered an oblong chest or box, which, in several important respects, bore a faint resemblance to the Mosaic ark. Supported on wooden arches neatly carved, it was thereby affixed to two poles, which rested on a rough table or tressel, and which were evidently designed as means of transporting it from place to place. Over it, as a defense from heat and rain, was a wide-stretching lid or canopy, neatly thatched with palm-nut leaves. The origin and history of this could not be ascertained; nor its significance or use, except so far as implied in the designation given to it by the natives, *"Ewharre no Eatua, the house of God."*

It may not be possible to indicate with certainty the source of this prevalent custom. There are some who believe that the cherubim on the outside of Eden's entrance, were connected with an ark and a tabernacle, to serve our first parents as a meeting place for sacrifice and worship,---a spot wherein they recognized the face or presence of Jehovah. Such a fact might well account for the widespread tradition; yet, on other grounds, the theory is hardly tenable. On the whole, it appears to us more congruous to refer the universal practice to the corruption of one retained idea---the one grand spiritual truth, namely, of God's willingness to stoop from heaven, and take up his abode with the human race. This truth Adam and Eve had learned, while unfallen in Paradise; for there the Lord God walked with them in the garden, there they heard His voice, and there they enjoyed the manifestations of His love. This truth they had learned yet more wondrously, when they had become sinners and exiles; for their offerings were graciously accepted, and

instead of hiding themselves from Jehovah's presence, they had been allowed to deem it their safeguard and their joy. This truth was handed down from age to age; but gradually it was overlaid by the superstitious notions of idolatry. Even before men began to make for themselves visible images of the Deity, the sensual tendency of their groveling hearts would lead them to construct for Him a visible abode. And when the abode was ready, the same propensity led most of them to go a step further, and furnish it with a representation of the occupant. Thus had idolatry become rampant in every land; and so long had the Hebrew nation been surrounded with its influences, that it was no easy matter to disentangle them from the tissue of their early prejudices. It was necessary to open the way gradually. Jehovah had more to teach them than they could yet bear: so he led them gently forward, step by step. The customary chest was retained, for it might serve useful ends; but its idolatrous accompaniments were laid aside, for these were irrational and sinful. Jehovah dwelt with it, but not in it. A shrine there might still be, but no image; a visible symbol of the Divine residence, but no visible representation of the Divine Being. "The tabernacle made with hands, with its utensils and ministers, bore," says Dr. Kitto, "a designed external resemblance to the Egyptian models; but purged of the details and peculiarities which were the most open to abuse and misconstruction." The appointment of the ark might thus serve as a stepping stone from heathenism, while, at the same time, it emblematically furnished the important teaching, that Jehovah is a God at hand, and not only a God afar off. Its unity also served a twofold purpose: it was to the Israelites a bond of national union, being designed to form the center of their worship, and witness to their oneness as a people; while it would also serve as a testimony against polytheism, and would witness to oneness in the object of their worship.

In more than one passage of Holy Scripture, the ark is emphatically and beautifully designated "the footstool" of God, * an expression which precisely harmonizes with what we have been advancing. The footstool seen, the presence of the unseen God in the cloud above was implied. But were there still any remaining doubt, it would be removed by the explicit declaration of Jehovah,*"there* I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee *from above* the mercy-seat, *from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark."* The Shechinah-cloud took possession of its appointed resting

place; and Moses "heard the voice of *one speaking unto him from off the mercy-seat that was upon the ark of testimony."* That consecrated spot had become God's earthly abode; there He dwelt to receive his people's prayer, and to grant them an answer of peace.

The remembrance, therefore, of the ark as the sacred object above which dwelt the manifested presence of the One only true and living God, was the motive which led the ancient Israelites, when at a distance from Jerusalem, to "look toward the holy temple," when they directed their voice of supplication to the Most High. Some there were, of strong faith and pure spirituality, who looked through the emblem to the thing symbolized. Isaiah was taught by the inspiring Spirit of prophecy, that "the high and lofty One," who dwells "in the high and holy place," resides "with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit." David was able to realize the Divine ubiquity, when he said," Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? if I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." But there were many who were of darker mind and earthlier notions; who retained their heathenish imaginings, that the Lord of heaven and earth can dwell in temples made with hands; who dreamed of Jehovah as a local Deity, and thought, like Jonah, that, to escape beyond the limits of Palestine, was to flee beyond the radiant circle of His presence.

That presence---who, who, would wish to flee? None save the guilty sinner. And is there a real necessity even for *him* to avoid it? Has not the ark told of God's *merciful* presence? If He had entertained no designs of pardon toward a sinful world, would it not have been easy for Him to withdraw entirely from earth, and leave it to a self-wrought overthrow? If He had cherished no intentions of grace, would it not have been a mockery of our hopes to offer us access to Himself? Surely those words of olden time, "They shall make an ark of shittim wood," are replete with consolation to the sinner. God has not forsaken the human race; He has not turned away, inexorable in his righteous indignation; but He looks down on us in love, stretches toward us the hand of pity, nay, vouchsafes to dwell in our midst. He has found means whereby grace is compatible with justice, and mercy with holiness. The fundamental lesson conveyed by the ark, speaks to us even now. The footstool is

withdrawn, but not the Divine presence. The outward sign is gone, but the inward manifestation is still granted. "That chair," said an aged saint, pointing to her favorite seat" that chair is witness that God in very deed dwells with man upon the earth." Let us, like her, cultivate communion with God, and our vivid experience of the blessedness which He bestows, will lead us to exclaim, with astonishment and thankfulness, "Lord! what is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou visitest him?"

"Thy favors, Lord, surprise our souls;
Will the Eternal dwell with us?
What canst thou find beneath the poles,
To tempt thy chariot downward thus?'

Great God! what poor returns we pay
For love so infinite as thine!
Words are but air, and tongues but clay;
But thy compassion's all divine."

Chapter 2 - The Construction of the Ark; or, God's Presence Glorious

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ARK;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE GLORIOUS.

THE fabrication of the ark was not left to the dictates of human judgment. Material and measure, outline and ornament, were alike prescribed. In form it was to be oblong, the height and width (2 1/4 feet) being the same, and each in the proportion of three-fifths to the length (3 3/4 feet). The specification is given, according to Hebrew measurement, in the following words:---"Two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof." The wood, as we have already seen, was to be of the "shittim," or probably acacia tree, much valued for its incorruptibility and beauty. This was to be overlaid "with pure gold, within and without." Next there was to be made "round about upon it a crown of gold,"---an ornamental rim or cornice,---to finish it off with elegance and taste, and possibly to supply also a groove whereon the lid might firmly rest. At four of the outside comers of the chest were to be "four rings of gold," so disposed that "two rings should be in the one side of it, and two rings in the other side of it;" while, corresponding with these rings, were two "staves of shittim wood," also overlaid with gold, and by means of which the ark might be borne from place to place.

There has been much controversy as to the position of these rings, some regarding the poles which passed through them as having run parallel with the breadth of the ark, while others believe them to have run lengthwise. The latter is the ordinary representation in engravings, and is corroborated by the statements of Josephus, and of many Rabbinical writers, who lay a stress on the distinction which they conceive to be made between the "side" and the" end" (comp. Exod. xxv vers. 12 and 19). On the other hand, there are Jewish authorities of equal note, who maintain that these terms are convertible; in which case, it would seem preferable to believe, that we may here understand

the word "side" in its literal import, as denoting neither the back nor front, but the *end* or*narrower side.* The bearers would by such arrangement have more freedom of motion; and we should thus be able consistently to explain the mode of the ark's location in the sanctuary,* without being constrained to assume, as Witsius and others have done, that it was placed with its narrow side toward the veil. Various questionings have also arisen, as to the elevation of the rings, whether near the crown, or about the center, or (as in the woodcut over leaf) at the base of the hallowed chest. That the word rendered "corners" may be translated "feet," is indisputable; and it is not unworthy of consideration, that the similar rings, made for the transport of the showbread table, were to be "on the four feet thereof," The supporters of this idea urge, further, the evident intention that the holy things should be borne aloft in the midst of the people; and they consequently argue, that the lower the staves, the more conspicuous would be the burden. On the contrary, it is asserted that, in conformity with mechanical laws, and with a view to preserve a just equilibrium, the massiveness of the ark required its rings and poles to be considerably higher than those which would serve for a lighter structure. We may, perhaps, regard this as an open question, and retain the idea to which popular representations have familiarized us.

{These points are gone into at full length by Van Til, in his Commentary on the Tabernacle; and by Buxtorf, in his inquiries concerning the ark (Exercitationes ad Historiam, No. I.) We may add, that the engravings customary in the present day are widely different from those which prevailed in earlier ages. In the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries we meet with representations of the ark wholly erroneous in the varied and fanciful forms assigned to it, but harmonizing in the consistent uprearing of it upon poles affixed to its base. (See, for example, the ark crossing Jordan, and the ark at the capture of Jericho---the one from an old MS., and the other from the "Speculum Humanæ Salvationis"---as they are given in L. Twining's "Types and Figures of the Bible, illustrated from early Christian Art."}

The lid, or cover of the ark, was to be "of pure gold," not made to project over, but fitted precisely in size to the dimensions of the ark, both in length and in width. Its height is unknown; and this would lead to the inference, that it was of no considerable thickness. In the original, it is simply called" *a cover;"* but the Septuagint and Vulgate having taken the secondary idea of

the verb from which it is derived, and having rendered it "a propitiatory," as if in reference to the covering of sin through the sprinkled blood of atonement, our translators have retained the latter idea, and have termed it "the mercy-seat." Whether any such signification was even remotely intended in the Hebrew, we need not determine. It is unquestionably true, that it is only in virtue of a propitiation that God can dwell with fallen men; and that if He, the Just and Righteous One, has a seat in their midst at all, it can be none other than a mercy-seat. To dwell with them on any other terms, He must either forego His justice, or ensure their destruction. The foundation laid for His manifested presence in the tabernacle, and in the temple, was based on that forgiving mercy which had devised a scheme of atonement, and had found in Christ crucified the needful ransom.

On the upper surface of the lid, were to be made "two cherubims of gold, of beaten work, in the two ends of the mercy-seat," one at either side. These were to be "beaten out of one piece," and so made "of the mercy-seat itself,"---or, as the margin reads, "of the matter of the mercy-seat," so as to be one with it. In posture they were to be face to face, not fronting the worshippers, but fronting the Shechinah-glory that lay beneath their outstretched forward-pointed wings. Concerning their form, little or comparatively nothing is revealed---in order, as Bernard Lamy has well said, that" no human language might describe them, no human pencil delineate them, and no human intellect conceive of them." The Bible tells us not whether they were figured standing, or kneeling; but, in either case, they were with their faces, not heavenward, but bending" toward the mercy-seat"---the attitude, as we take it, of lowly adoration and fixed attention. We shall not attempt to discuss the long-agitated and greatly complicated question which arises as to the nature and symbolism of the cherubs. Whether they were emblematic of the attributes possessed by the Divine Being, who there revealed himself as the Hearer and Answerer of prayer, wise to counsel, valiant to protect, mighty to help, and swift to relieve---whether they represented angelic 'existences attendant on their Sovereign Lord, and bending an eager glaze to look upon the wondrous mystery of His grace---or whether they were figurative of redeemed humanity elevated to the enjoyment of intercourse with a pardoning God it may not be possible to decide. Weighty and worthy names are ranked in support of each hypothesis. It must suffice for our present purpose to note, that whatever may

have been their typical import, it was between them, and on the mercy-seat, that the actual manifestation of Jehovah was vouchsafed. Hence the oft-recurring phrase, "0h Lord God of Israel! which dwellest between the cherubims;" "thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth!" "the Lord reigneth, let the people tremble; He sitteth between the cherubims, let the earth be moved;" ---phrases, which to the Jewish ear were replete with intensity of meaning;---phrases, which told them that the Lord their God was with them, and the shout of a King in their midst.

We marvel not that the shittim wood should have been completely encased in gold; we wonder not that the mercy-seat, whereon the presence-cloud rested, should have been entirely formed of the same precious metal; we wonder not that the gold was to be pure; nor that, when the work was complete, the whole had to be anointed with a perfumed oil. It was fitting that everything should be of the costliest. It was needful that the Almighty should thus "make the place of His feet glorious." None but a magnificent shrine would comport with the majestic presence which was there to be revealed---the presence of Him before whom angels veil their faces, and cry 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the hole earth is full of His glory!" It is true that the splendors of the ark were not required to bribe His favor, or to allure His stay. He could already declare, "The silver is mine, and the gold is mine," and if I were impoverished, "I would not tell thee, for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof." A more resplendent throne He had in that brighter world above, whose surpassing glories can only be faintly portrayed to our dull apprehensions under the image of golden streets, and pearly gates, and jewel-garnished walls. We may not think, however, that this expenditure was vainly lavished. If unprofitable to Him, it was of use on man's account. It was to the Jew a pictorial teaching, an impressive memorial of God's transcendent greatness. It was calculated to keep alive the remembrance that God's condescension *was* a condescension. It was fitted to remind the worshipper that God *"humbleth* himself to behold the things that are in heaven," and much more so, to regard the things "that are in the earth." The mere fact of God's manifested presence ought to have led to the acknowledgment, that His ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts; and yet it was possible for this very fact to become so familiar to the mind as to engender the false idea that He is altogether such an one as ourselves. We let

His goodness too often eclipse, whereas it ought only to illustrate His greatness. It were well for us more often to address ourselves to Him as the God who *once*dwelt between the cherubim, and to recall to mind that He is the same God still. His presence is none the less glorious because there is no longer a visible display of glory in connection with its manifestation in anyone selected and hallowed spot. He who deigned to make the ark His footstool, views the whole earth as none too vast for the purpose. (Matt. V, 35; Acts vii. 49.) He who dwelt above the mercy-seat, occupies a heavenly throne. He is willing, indeed, to reveal Himself to the heart of man; but it must be as "the God of glory." He requires that His presence be reverenced. He will not abide where sin is cherished. He demands that the chamber of the heart be inlaid with the pure gold of holiness, and consecrated with the unction of heavenly grace. "God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing." "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God."

Chapter 3 - The Location and Guardianship of the Ark; or, God's Presence Concealed

THE LOCATION AND GUARDIANSHIP
OF THE ARK;
OR,
GOD'S PRESENCE CONCEALED.

AMONG the articles that composed the furniture of the tabernacle, there was one which, as to material, size, and construction, bore, in many respects, a close resemblance to the lower part of the ark. We allude to the table of show-bread. Both were of shittim wood, both were overlaid with gold, both were ornamented with an edge-crown, both measured the same in height and width and length; both were furnished with rings and staves to avoid the defilement of human touch. But there was an essential difference in their location---a difference answering to the diversity of their use. The one, as a table, was to be placed "before the Lord;" the other, as a footstool, was to be beneath His throne. Hence, the former was assigned its standing in the holy place; the latter was put within the Holy of Holies. "Thou shalt hang up the veil under the taches, that thou mayest bring it thither within the veil the ark of the testimony; and the veil shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy: and thou shalt put the mercy-seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place: and thou shalt set the table without the veil . . . on the north side."

Concealment of the ark from ordinary gaze was the obvious design of this distinction; and this purpose was steadily kept in view in every arrangement. One entire tribe was set apart for the services connected with it. "The Lord separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord, to minister unto Him, and to bless in His name." Even this had been too free a grant of publicity: consequently, of the Levites

themselves, none might approach the sacred chest but the family of Kohath, who were constituted its bearers. For anyone else to come near it, was the instant forfeiture of life: "the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death." The Kohathites, when they were allowed to carry, might not dare to touch it; "the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it, but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die." This it was which gave rise to the provision of the rings and staves; "unto the sons of Kohath he gave no wagons or oxen, because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders." Hence also the command, "the staves shall be in the rings of the ark, they shall not be taken from it," a direction which not only ensured the security of the poles, and facilitated speedy departure in case of urgent haste, but also guarded against the risk of any contact with the ark in the replacement of them.

But this was not all. From among the descendants of Kohath had been chosen one branch, to whom alone was confided the guardianship of the coffer: "Cut ye not off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites,"---that is to say, cause them not to be cut off by granting them unrestricted access to the ark; "they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die;" but "when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, *after that* the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it."

Another distinction was made. When the ark rested, none might enter the Holy of Holies, save the chief representative of the priestly line: and only on the annual day of atonement was it permitted even to him. "Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil before the mercy-seat, which is upon the ark, that he die not; for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat." On the tenth day of the seventh month, and then alone, might he stand immediately before the ark, sprinkling the sacrificial blood; and even then was the cloud of incense from his burning censer "to cover the mercy-seat" with its vapory mist.

There was no flood of earthly light, natural or artificial, poured upon the view, and revealing every object in that sanctum with a blaze of radiance. While the outer court was visited by the light of heaven, and the holy place illumed by the seven-lamped candlestick of gold, the Holiest of all was penetrated by no created rays. "The Lord said that He would dwell in the

thick darkness." Whatever there might be of illumination proceeded from the Divine presence, from the glory which filled the house---a glory, moreover, which was not unshrouded. It was "in the cloud" that Jehovah appeared; for "there was the hiding of His power." None might endure the effulgence of His unveiled countenance, none abide the dazzling splendor of His full revealment. The precise nature of the glory-cloud must be to us, at least for the present, a matter of conjecture. We know that it was all attempered brightness; and yet we know it was such as mortal vision might not steadfastly behold. "Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." Mild and subdued we may believe it to have been, when the trembling high-priest advanced to the reverential discharge of his solemn duty; but easily kindled, even to the emission of a devouring flame, if approached with an uncommanded footstep, and a bold, presumptuous heart.

We are at no loss to understand the teaching which this guarded concealment was to impress upon the Israelites. There was in this nothing of the mystery which false religions have affected for the sake of awing the multitude. There was nothing of the reserve with which impure religions have cloaked their deeds of wickedness. The whole is resolvable into the simple fact, that no man can see Jehovah's face, and live; for "God is light," and dwells "in the light which no man can approach unto." If He dwelt on earth, He could not do otherwise than make "darkness His secret place." If He clothed His presence in a visible form or symbol, it must of necessity be one that would hide, rather than reveal, His divine essence. If He admitted man into His audience-chamber, it must be in the person of a representative; the one must approach in behalf of the many. The seed of Abraham were to behold in this a marked protest against idolatry. They were distinguished from nations around by their worship of an unseen Deity. They might have no glimpse of Jehovah's form, they might make to themselves no fancied representation of it. Unprepared for this notion of pure spirituality, they were allowed the ark as a material symbol or sign; but lest they should make *that* the object of their worship, it was sedulously removed from their gaze. Visible in itself, to the people it must be unseen. Thus it furnished an initial lesson of faith in the Invisible. Generation after generation knew that the ark was behind the veil; from time to time, they, or their fathers, had seen the veiled burden borne from one

resting place to another; and, year by year, their chief priest entered the most holy place, and there dimly discerned its glittering presence. They themselves saw it not, but on testimony they believed in its existence. They never had the right to look upon it, but they nevertheless continued to look towards it. And this reverence for an unseen but material ark, as the earthly proof of Divine residence in their midst, was a help to their belief in the unseen because immaterial presence of their God.

The same lesson it is still ours to learn. "God is a Spirit," and we "have not heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape." Whether in a future world our bodily eyes shall be fitted to behold God face to face, except in the person of the glorified Mediator, the revelations of eternity will disclose. This we know, that, while sojourners here, we may enjoy the manifestations of His spiritual presence, but not the actual vision of His brightness. "Whom no man hath seen, nor can see," is a declaration of the New Testament as well as of the Old. But there is One clothed in our nature, who has "entered for us within the veil," even Jesus, "made an high-priest forever." He is our advocate with the Father; He stands, not in "the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true," but in "heaven itself;" there He appears "in the presence of God for us;" there He makes intercession in our behalf, and offers our prayers in His golden censer before the everlasting throne. Through Him we have access unto the Father; and He has given us assurance that His people shall one day be with Him in Paradise. All which that promise includes, we may as yet be unable to fathom; but when we reach yonder bright abode, it will be given us to understand the full meaning of the words, "In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Chapter 4 - The Contents of the Ark; or, God's Presence Linked with Man's Duty

THE CONTENTS OF THE ARK;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE LINKED WITH MAN'S DUTY.

THE ark was not to be an empty or useless receptacle. It was to contain a sacred deposit. "Thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee." This testimony was written on two tables of stone with the finger of God himself, and then placed for safe keeping within the sacred chest. "I turned myself," says Moses, "and came down from the mount, and put the tables in the ark which I had made; and there they be, as the Lord commanded me." Thus the coffer was usually denominated "the ark of the testimony," or "the ark of the covenant," or "the ark of the testament," because within it were placed" the tables of testimony" that embodied the sum and substance of God's covenant. In the Decalogue were contained the grand requirements of the moral law, and in them the fundamental principles which lay at the basis of the ceremonial code. It is easy to trace the wisdom of the lodgment which was assigned to it. Primarily and practically this answered the end of complete preservation. Not only were the statutes thus secured from loss, but likewise from interpolations and erasures. So long as the finger of man durst not touch the graven tablets, the wickedness of man could not tamper with them. They rested as though beneath the lawgiver's immediate eye; they remained ever beneath His manifest protection. Such an attempt as Popery has made to cancel one of the divine precepts, was unparalleled among the Jews. Graven images they made, but made them in violation of a law they durst not disavow. There were some among the sons of Israel, who cried, "When will the Sabbath be gone, that we may set forth wheat?" but, glad as they would have been to expunge the Fourth Commandment, they durst not deny its heavenly origin. Well they knew that

any design and any effort to promulge a false version must prove futile, while the original lay in the Holy of Holies, a perpetual witness to the divine requirements. The same glorious presence which once attended their utterance, hovered still over their place of preservation. He who had given the law in Sinai, now guarded it in the sanctuary. Surely there was here an apt illustrati0n, if not an intended symbol, of that which every age of the church's history has demonstrated to be truth; namely, that "the eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge, and He overthroweth the words of the transgressor." It is His omniscient watchfulness that has continued to guard the truth in its purity; it is His Spirit's presence that still watches over the revealed record. The withdrawal of the visible sign has emboldened error in its attacks; but the unslumbering gaze of Him who sent forth the inspired volume, has ever marked the enemy's advances, and has invariably frustrated the schemes of the evildoer. "The righteousness of His testimonies is everlasting."

We believe that there was also a secondary and typical purpose in the depositing of the testimony within the ark. There seems to have been here a shadowing forth of the relationship between God and men; an implied teaching, that the presence of the Almighty on earth is that of a lawgiver, a moral governor,---one who has a right to impose statutes, and a claim to demand obedience. Throughout Scripture we find that God's residence with His creatures is linked with their subjection and allegiance:---"If ye will walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments and do them, then I will have respect unto you, and establish my covenant with you, and I will set my tabernacle among you, and my soul shall not abhor you." "They shall walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them; . . . and I will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore, and the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them." "If a man love me he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." It is true, that the righteous law of God was imperfectly kept even by Israel's best and holiest men, while yet the Shechinah-cloud was not withdrawn; but we remember, that the mercy-seat was "above upon the ark," when the testimony had been placed within. The just God was also a Savior. The Lawgiver was able to pardon,' while yet the honor of His law was unimpaired. An atonement was in the fullness of time to be wrought out. The Son of God was

to ascend on high, to lead captivity captive, and to receive gifts for men," yea, for the rebellious also," for the express purpose "that the Lord God might dwell among them." To such as believed in Him, to such as through Him hoped in God's mercy, the law, as to its condemning power, was *hid.* It was not abolished, for it was still the perfect standard of rectitude, the needful rule of life; but it was so covered, that to the man of penitence and faith it was no longer an accusing witness, no longer a bar to the shining of God's face.

There was yet another form, in which the law of God was transcribed---an enlarged, or rather supplemental form---the book of the law as penned by Moses, concerning which the direction was given, "Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee." The manuscript-roll contained, for the most part, the minute and varied precepts of the Levitical code, with all the ordinances and observances which were laid down for the Jews as a peculiar people. This was to be laid, not within, but "in the side of" or "beside" the ark.

[There is some difference of opinion as to whether the book of the law was placed within or without the veil. If it was from the roll of Moses that the Levites were accustomed to read to the people, then must it have been accessible in the holy place, since it was read at other times besides the day of expiation, But if the perusal was from a copy, as we incline to think, then there is no ground for disbelieving that the original was in the Holy of Holies. Tradition states that it was kept in a small coffer made for the purpose. The autograph, having probably in later years been misplaced, was found by Hilkiah the priest in the days of King Josiah (2 Kings xxii, 8).]

The difference of *nature* between this and the tables of testimony, sufficiently accounts for the difference of *place.* The moral law embraced the essential requisitions of God's government; the ceremonial law included (if we may so term them) the accidental arrangements of it. Had the former been fully obeyed by the human race, there had probably been no necessity for the latter. God manifested His presence as the giver of the moral law; but, in order that His presence might be retained among fallen men, He appointed, until the Messiah's advent, the typical ordinances of the ceremonial law. The obeying, or the breaking, of the fundamental precepts acquitted or convicted man of sin; the believing use, or unbelieving rejection, of the ritual institutes

determined the grant or the withholdment of pardon. The record, therefore, of the latter was *not* placed beneath the mercy-seat,---as if to teach that, should the services of expiation be willfully and wholly neglected, there remained "no more sacrifice for sin" than that which they prefigured. If the Decalogue was hid beneath the mercy-seat, to denote the putting away through Christ of the law's condemnatory evidence, then is there a peculiar emphasis in the fact, that the Mosaic statute-book, on the other hand, was expressly placed beside the ark, in order that it might be "a witness *against"* such as violated its provisions of mercy. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin;" but if we persist in rejecting Him, we reject our only hope.

It has been a debated point, whether the ark held anything more than the tables of the covenant. We are distinctly told, that when placed in the temple, "there was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb;" (1 Kings viii. 9.) whereas the Apostle Paul, speaking of the Holiest of all, says, "Which had the golden censer, and *the ark* of the covenant, *wherein*was the golden pot that had manna, *and* Aaron's rod that budded, *and the tables of the covenant;* and *over it the cherubims of glory." (*Heb. ix, 4, 6.) Nothing can be more explicit than the phraseology of both passages; and there seems no satisfactory mode of harmonizing them, except that of taking each as it stands, and regarding the two as referable to distinct periods of the ark's history. The decided majority of our commentators are now agreed, that in the Epistle to the Hebrews we have an account of things as they were in the time of Moses; but that before the days of Solomon, perhaps during the captivity among the Philistines, the vase of manna and the miraculous rod of Aaron had been lost. Whether this be the correct interpretation, or not---whether these things were in the ark, or near it---still the connection between them and the sacred footstool of Deity was so marked as to demand a brief consideration of the circumstances which were thus memorialized.

Little more than two months had elapsed from the time of their quitting Egypt, when the Israelites murmured for want of food. Distrustful of the mighty hand which, in the land of Zoan, and at the Red Sea, had wrought wonders in their behalf,---forgetful also of the goodness which had converted for them the bitter waters of Marah into a palatable and refreshing beverage-they declared that they had been led into the wilderness to be

consumed of hunger. But their impious repinings were arrested by an undeserved interposition. Food from heaven was rained down upon them six days in the week, and the Sabbath's portion given them in advance. For forty years was the Heaven-sent bounty continued; nor did it cease until they reached Canaan, and ate of the corn of the land. When the miracle was no longer needed, it was withheld. But it was not to be forgotten. An omer, or single portion, had been set aside, that it might be preserved from generation to generation, as a ' specimen and as a remembrancer of the wilderness-supply. To Aaron's care it was confided; by him it was treasured, until the ark was lodged within the tabernacle; and there, in a golden vase, it was laid up "before the testimony,"* (Exod. xvi, 32-34.) betokening that He who presenced himself among His people, was ready to provide for their every want. If Jehovah was their lawgiver, He was also their protector. If He claimed their obedience, He also deserved their trust. If He took up His abode in their midst, it was to bless them. When He consented to say of the earthly tabernacle or temple, "This is my rest forever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it," the promise was given, " I will abundantly bless her provision, I will satisfy her poor with bread." When the Psalmist commemorated the Divine residence on earth, he broke forth into the doxology, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits." And when the prophet gave the assurance, concerning the godly man in his day, "Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure," it was in connection with the further prophecy, "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty." So is it with us in these latter times, If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." The soul that enjoys God's spiritual presence is never wanting in spiritual food. When we sit down under His shadow, we find His fruit sweet to our taste, "all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old," which He hath stored up for us. So will it be in the world to come. The redeemed are before the throne of God, and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them; they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters."He that overcometh," shall not only sit with Christ on His throne, but it shall be given him to eat of "the hidden manna."

Aaron's rod was another memento of Israel's rebelliousness. The brother of

Moses had been chosen, as we have already noticed, from among his tribe and family, and devoted to the sacerdotal office. One of the Kohathites, Korah by name, was jealous of his cousin's advancement to superior dignity; and, in conjunction with some of the Reubenites, whose tents were adjacent to the encampment of the Kohathites, he stirred up a revolt in the congregation. Signal punishment followed the daring conspiracy. Korah and his company, who aspired to the priesthood, were consumed with fire at the door of the tabernacle; their tents, with those of Dathan and Abiram, were suddenly entombed within the earth that clave asunder to receive them; and, on the ensuing day, a plague broke out among the people, whom they had infected with the contagion of their sin. Then, with a view to demonstrate more unmistakably the irrevocable choice of Aaron's line as that of the priesthood, each tribe was commanded to bring an almond branch inscribed with its distinctive name; and these, together with that of Aaron, were left for one night in the tabernacle. The morning's light revealed whom God had chosen. Every other rod was dry and dead, as when delivered into Moses' charge; that of Aaron had budded; nay, in one short night, had blossomed; nay, as though to prove yet more distinctly that no human collusion had forced it into precocious bloom, it also yielded almonds. The wondrous sight of buds, blossoms, and fruit, upon the same stem,---and that the branch of an almond, a tree which in Judea took two months from its flowering to its fruit-bearing,---was sufficient to convince every beholder that the portent was from above. Then was it further commanded by Jehovah that this living branch should be brought "again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels." The knowledge that it was there might well deter the rash footstep of such as had no permission to enter the Holy of Holies, while the same knowledge might serve to encourage the high-priest with the assurance that, being of Aaron's house, he might enter without peril. The placing of it beneath the overshadowing cloud of glory, denoted that He who dwelt there could alone confer on the selected high-priest, and his lineal successors, the right to approach the sacred presence. It denoted God's sovereign claim to appoint whom He would to minister before Him:---"No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron: so also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high-priest." Of Him it had been said in the language of prophecy, "I will cause Him to draw near, and He shall approach unto me." And so, through Him, are believers "a chosen generation,

a royal priesthood." When they walk in the light of God's countenance, they say, "Blessed is the man whom *thou choosest*, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts." When they fall down before the Lamb, their song is, *"Thou hast made* us unto our God kings and priests."

When, or how, the treasured urn of manna, and the fruitful almond-rod were lost, it is impossible to say. Various theories have been propounded. Some have thought, that they continued among the holy things of the sanctuary until the destruction of Solomon's temple; while others have believed, that the time of their disappearance from the interior of the ark was the date of their destruction. We need not say a word in disproof of the ecclesiastical fable which enumerated these remains of Jewish antiquity among the relics in the Church of the Lateran at the time of Pope Sixtus the Fifth; especially as rival vases and almond-branches have been the property of other churches, as in Paris, Bordeaux, &c. That they were wanting in the second temple is certain; that they were ever in the first temple is (to say the least) doubtful. Of one thing we are assured,---that the providence of God could have ensured their safety, had their longer preservation been necessary. We may believe that they were in careful keeping until they had done their work. They may have been chiefly intended to meet the exigencies of the people, first during their pilgrim-state, and then during their infancy as a nation. When they were fairly established in Canaan, the grand purpose of these emblems had been accomplished. When Jehovah had planted His people in "a land flowing with milk and honey," a land wherein they could eat bread without scarceness,---when He had commanded judges, and raised up princes, to "feed" his people Israel,---the memorial of His past bounty was not a more convincing proof of His providential care than were the innumerable mercies with which He continued to surround them. And when the priesthood was firmly established ---when the office had been repeatedly handed down from father to son, without a gainsaying word or a rebellious murmur---it was no longer needful that there should be a marked indication of that which none contested.

With or without such memorials, the duty of the Jew was clear. He had to obey God's holy law, to trust His fatherly care, to submit to His wise decrees. And our duty is the same. Is God willing to dwell among us? we must welcome Him by a cheerful obedience. Has He manifested His presence? we must confide in His bountiful love. Does he allow us to approach His

footstool? we must humbly acknowledge His sovereign grace.

Chapter 5 - The Ark in the Wilderness; or, God's Presence amid Life's Changes

THE ARK IN THE WILDERNESS;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE AMID LIFE'S CHANGES.

THE orders given for the preparation of the tabernacle and its appurtenances were obeyed with alacrity and exactitude. The people hastened to bring their free-will offerings; the women busied themselves in spinning; Bezaleel and Aholiab, with their coadjutors, put forth wise-hearted and able-handed efforts, until the finished work stood forth the accurate embodiment of the heavenly ideals On the opening day of the Israelites' second year of liberty, the glorious tent was pitched, the testimony placed within the ark, and the ark removed to its destined position; "and on the day that the tabernacle was reared up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony; and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning: so it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night."

Yet was this habitation but a moveable one, and its continuance at Sinai but transient. The people knew that they were only sojourners, and had been forewarned of the signals which were to announce the renewal of their march. One month and twenty days had elapsed after the setting up of the wondrous fabric, when the summons came for its transference to another site. The pillar of cloud, which had been stationary above the hinder end of the tabernacle, was lifted up, and the camp was in immediate motion. Every tribe, every family, was engaged in preparations for removal; while the Levites occupied themselves in arrangements for the conveyance of the sacred vessels. Aaron and his sons entered the holiest of all, whence the Divine presence had retired; and they reverently covered the ark, first with" the veil of testimony,"

then with a wrapper of seal-skin, over which they spread "a cloth wholly of blue." The staves having been pushed forward through the rings in which they stood, all was in readiness for those who were to bear the precious freight. When sufficient interval had been afforded, the priests took the two silver trumpets, and blew the note of "alarm," which signaled the starting of the procession. At the first blast, the tribe of Judah moved forward, followed by those of Issachar and Zebulun, who had all been stationed in front of the tabernacle's entrance, on the eastern side of the encampment. When these warriors, nearly two hundred thousand in number, had defiled in orderly array, the families of Merari and Gershon followed with the six wagons that contained the framework of the sanctuary. The oxen having moved off, a second trumpet blast resounded, on which the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad advanced in due rotation from the southern side; and after them the Kohathites, bearing the vessels of the sacred" ministry;" the voice of Moses, meanwhile, giving utterance to the prayer, "Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee!" The westward side of the encampment was the next to move, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin joining the procession, which was closed by Dan, Asher, and Naphtali, who had been waiting on the north. Then the spot, which for a time had known them, knew them no more. The outspread tents, the busy throng, the gorgeous shrine, the cloudy canopy, all were gone; and the base of Sinai's mount was abandoned to its former solitude.

Into the desert the serried ranks pursued their way, guided by the mysterious pillar which at night illumined their darkness, and by day afforded a shadow to screen them from the sun's oppressive rays. For three days they pursued their way, unknowing whither it might tend, but obedient to the will of Him who had undertaken to be their Guide. Wherever the cloud moved, thither they followed. No weariness might lead them to pitch their tents unbidden; no tempting oases on the right or left might allure them to turn aside from the indicated track. At length "the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran." From Sinai's desert they had passed into another dreary waste. They might not see aught inviting to the eye, or pleasurable to the fancy; nevertheless, "where the cloud abode, THERE the children of Israel pitched their tents;" for there alone could they have the Divine presence in their midst. "The ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them in the three days' journey, to search

out a resting place for them;" and when the resting place had been found, they durst not oppose the sovereignty of the choice, even when they unbelievingly doubted its wisdom.

The same method was always observed in their halting which had regulated the outset of their journey. As they had been encamped at first, so they once more arranged themselves, that they might be prepared at a renewed summons for a fresh removal. The three foremost tribes, having reached the divinely selected spot, drove their stakes into the ground, stretched out their awnings, secured their cordage, and the fluttering canvas of "the camp of Judah" was again ranged along the forefront of the temporary settlement. The Merarites and Gershonites unloaded their carts, fastened the silver sockets, set up the boards, made firm the bars, reared the pillars of the court, hung up the curtains, spread abroad the coverings, and had all in readiness for the approach of the ark. In the meanwhile, the three tribes forming "the camp of Reuben" arrived, and fell one behind the other in their allotted quarter. The Kohathites passed along the side of the tabernacle, came round to its entrance, passed through the holy place, and laid their well-veiled burden in its former position, at the inner end of the structure. The voice of Moses was again heard, as it cried, "Return, 0h Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel!" The ark-bearers withdrew. Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar, removed the coverings; the veil once more concealed the Holy of Holies; and the presence of the Most High again found a place of earthly residence. The Levites pitched in their assigned locations, as guardians of the tabernacle,---the three distinctive families on the three several sides of it,---while Moses and the priestly household kept watch before its gate. Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, took their customary station behind the tabernacle; and the standard of "the camp of Dan" led the rearward of the army to their post on the vacant side of the quadrangle.

Such were the forms observed, and such the order followed, in every successive removal. "When the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed: at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle, they rested in their tents; but when it was taken up, they journeyed." Whether in progress or at rest, the sight of Israel's host must have been an imposing one. We can scarcely conceive a

finer spectacle than the view of those 603,550 warriors, with their wives and children, grouped around their mysterious central tent; or, in company with its yet more mysterious contents, shrouded from their gaze by a purple coverlet, treading their way through the pathless wilds of *Arabia Deserta.* Enemies were around; and we might almost wonder that human cupidity should have suffered treasures so costly to be so easily retained. We might almost wonder that the history of their wanderings was not a history traced in lines of blood,---a martyrology, filled with the names of such as had breathed their last in defending the valuable ensigns of the Mosaic faith. But we may not forget the higher than human guardianship that controlled the desert march. The cloud that guided them, the ark that accompanied them, were but the tokens of His guidance who knew how to lead them by a safe path. And many a time they may have been led away from green spots and bubbling wells into the terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought; because the Omniscient eye saw that beside the verdant fields or sparkling springs were ambushed foes, who would have inflicted a direr wound, wrought a more fearful mischief, and compassed a more grievous deprivation. It was not their multitude of mighty men, not their valor, not their weapons, that availed to defend them from attacks; but it was the overruling hand which led them step by step.

"They trode in peace the Arab sand
In martial pomp and show;
With banners spread, and swords in hand,
None dared to be a foe.
Though wandering o'er the earth's wide face,
None dared molest the sacred race.

For o'er the ark still hover'd nigh
The mystic guide and shield;
A cloud, when day o'erspread the sky,---
A flame, when night conceaI'd;
This pointed out their dnious way,
Or told their armies when to stay."

It is not easy to draw out an exact and orderly list of the various encampments; but we read of at least forty stations between Sinai and the banks of Jordan,---in a period, that is, of about eight-and-thirty years. The intervals were quite irregular, and the times of starting altogether uncertain. "Whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed; or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not," There is something very beautiful in the implicit submissiveness with which they cast themselves on the Divine guidance. Thrice, in the space of but a few verses, it is emphatically reiterated, that "at the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed." It is true, that they had with them the escort of Hobab the Midianite, whose company Moses had urged, on the plea, "Leave us not, I pray thee, forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes." But it is manifest that they looked not to him for the marking out of their course. His aid would only be needful, as it were, in filling up the outline, in teaching them to avail themselves of every advantage, or to protect themselves against every danger that might inhere in the locality to which their steps were directed. Human advice they did not spurn; but they made it an auxiliary to the counsel given them from on high, and not a substitute for it.

To the obedience, however, of which we speak, there was one solitary exception, whose early occurrence and disastrous result may have been of benefit in securing their subsequent docility. It was at Kadesh, in the Wilderness of Paran, at no great interval after having left Sinai, that they hearkened to the false report of the unbelieving spies, and brought upon themselves the doom of filling up a forty years' sojourn in the desert. The people acknowledged their sin; and, moreover, they turned from it; for instead of persistence in their dread of entering Canaan, they evinced the utmost readiness to encounter all those difficulties which had so recently appalled them. But they erred in thinking to escape the sentence which had gone forth against them for their want of faith. They fancied that confession and reformation would supply the place of humble penitence. They would not "accept the punishment of their iniquity." Moses remonstrated, saying,

"Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the Lord? but it shall not prosper: go not up; for the Lord is not among you, that ye be not smitten before your enemies; for the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you; and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the Lord, therefore the Lord will not be with you." His exhortations were unheeded. Bent upon their project, "they presumed to go up unto the hilltop." They watched not for the moving of the cloud; they tarried not for the taking down of the tabernacle; they waited not for the signal of command. "The ark of the covenant of the Lord departed not out of the camp;" Moses also remained by its side; and without a leader, either human or divine, Israel set foot in the enemy's land. The result is not surprising. "Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah." It was a sharp lesson, but one which proved effectual. They learned their dependence on the God of the ark, and thenceforth followed His directions.

We have purposely dwelt at length on these interesting details; and we doubt not that the minds of our readers will already have recurred to the lessons which, by analogy, are here presented to our view. Like the Israelites, we are passing through an unknown land; and if we would have the whole, or even a day's journey of life to be prosperous, we must make Israel's prayers our own. At every turn or change we should specially implore the continuance of the Divine favor. When our nest is stirred up, and we are driven away from the home of early delights and long associations, we must cry, "Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; if thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence!" And when we are led into new spheres of duty and new scenes of interest, we must entreat, "Return, 0h Lord, and manifest thyself to us as unto the many thousands of Israel; withdraw not the shining of thy countenance; dwell with us still; abide with us again; go ever where we go, and tarry where we stay!" But if we would sincerely make these prayers our own, we must also make Israel's obedience ours. We must always watch "the cloud," so as to follow the leadings of Providence, instead of the devices and desires of our own frail and erring hearts.

This subject has a twofold warning. It checks the restlessness of some, and chides the rootedness of others. In the former class, there is a love of change---a fickle hankering after novelty---a constant dissatisfaction with the present,

and aspiration after the future. Such are the rolling stones that gather no moss--the wandering birds, whose forsaken nests testify to their folly and their danger. Very seldom are the rovings of such a man conducive to his peace of mind. Ordinarily they serve but to aggravate his distempered fancies. As one locality after another disappoints, so one after another continues to attract him; and, like the vagrant butterfly, he roams far and wide, alighting here and there for a brief moment, idling away his life in dreams of bliss, but never so settling down as to taste real satisfaction, or to work real good. There is much force in the old saying, "A believer never yet carved for himself but he cut his fingers." It is best for us when we can be content to "abide in the calling" wherein we are found, until there is a clear intimation that our heavenly Father would have us quit it. It has been well remarked, that "the *stops* as well as the *steps*of a good man are ordered by the Lord;" and it is as important to tarry at His bidding, as it is to go forth at His leading; as important to move only *when* He pleases, as it is to go only *where* He pleases. If the cloud be stationary for a year, or even for years, we must be as willing to stay as if it were abiding only for a day, or a month. We must learn the godly art of resigning ourselves to His leadership, content to be taken by a way that we know not. We have His promise, "I will guide thee with mine eye," and we must look Upward for the commanding sign ere we move from our position. Instead of picking out a by-path for ourselves, we must keep straight along the indicated road; when that turns to the right or to the left, we must turn, but not till then; and when that is hedged up, we must patiently wait for the Lord. We may be weary of our resting place; but this is not a sufficient plea for abandoning it. If we quit it merely through our own willfulness, we risk leaving with it the precincts where we can hold communion with God. We cannot ask or expect His presence to go with us, if we move while He would have us to rest.

But there are others who would fain rest when God bids them arise and depart. Rooted in their attachment to places and pursuits, they rebel against any exclusion from their favorite haunts, and any interruption of their cherished schemes. The will of God often thwarts this state of feeling. His all-seeing and far-seeing eye detects the peril that would accrue from the indulgence of it. When He beholds any who have been "at ease from their youth," who have not been "emptied from vessel to vessel," and who are

therefore become as wine" settled on the lees," He will deem it needful, if they are His children, to bring them through a purifying process, by sending to them "wanderers that shall cause them to wander, and shall empty their vessels, and shall break their bottles." We need at times to be reminded, that this is not our rest; that "here we have no continuing city;" that "our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding." We are apt to forget these things, unless at times our "purposes are broken off," and the "possessions of our heart" wrested from the affections that grasp them but too eagerly. It is the hand of mercy that then obstructs our path, and makes us turn aside into another line of duty. We may not resist the pressure of that kindly impulse. We may not close our ears to the voice that so plainly says, "This is the way, walk ye in it." We may not linger in the plain when we have been directed to climb the steep hillside. We may not cast a wistful glance upon the mountaintop when we have been ordered into the humble valley. The certainty that we must at some time, and that we may often have to strike our earthly tent, should keep us from so heaping the earth around the stakes of it as to make their dislodgment an effort and a struggle. If the cloud move every month---if it move every other day---still we must be willing to commit our way to God, and know no will but His. Let us habitually remember that the enjoyment of God's presence should be the one absorbing desire in our hearts. That withdrawn, the paradise to which we cling will be converted into a waste howling wilderness; but that granted, the desert from which we shrink will be invested with the excellency of Carmel and Sharon. Let our choice of a residence and our plans in life, so far as they seem left to our free selection, be regulated by the consideration, Where can we best glorify God? and, Where are we most likely to realize His blessing? Whether making our own determination, or complying with the determination made for us by our friends, let us entreat, that in every changing scene of life we may share in that comprehensive promise, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest."

Chapter 6 - The Ark at Jordan; or, God's Presence amid Life's Afflictions

THE ARK AT JORDAN;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE AMID

LIFE'S AFFLICTIONS.

ON reaching Abel-shittim, which was situated in the plains of Moab, the Israelites found only the Jordan rolling between them and the desired land of promise. Beside the river's bank their camp was for a season pitched; and many, doubtless, were the surmises raised among the people concerning the mode in which their transit was to be effected. The waters were now swollen to their utmost height, for it was barley-harvest, the season when Jordan was wont to overflow its banks. Many an anxious eye must have turned upon the wide and turbid stream as its waters rolled hurriedly onward in the direction of the Asphaltitic lake; and many an eager gaze must have rested on the fertile fields that lay beyond, seemingly as inaccessible as they were inviting. Well might be called to mind the history which had been told concerning the marvelous drying up of the Red Sea; but with it would also be united the recollection, that the famous legislator who had been empowered to work so many miracles was now numbered with the dead. At this crisis a message was brought, which served to heighten their wondering expectancy. "The officers went through the host," and announced, that on this occasion there was to be a deviation from the usual order of march. The ark was to take the lead; and though the people were to follow, it was to be at a fixed and reverential distance. They might not start until it was 2000 cubits (or somewhat more than half a mile) in advance of them. A reason was assigned for these remarkable injunctions: "ye have not passed this way heretofore." But what could this mean? had not their whole path been to them a strange and untried road? Joshua's accents were soon heard in explanation of the mysterious phrase: "Sanctify yourselves," he said; "for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." The set day having come, the procession was

formed; the ark being carried first, and borne this time, not by the inferior Kohathites, but by the priests themselves, the more honored branch of the same Levitical family. Onward they conveyed the sacred symbol, in a straight course, to the water's edge. No bridge had been thrown across; no ice had consolidated the surface; no passageway was visible. Naught lay before them save the deep and rushing torrent, in its most impetuous mood. No wonder-working rod was stretched out; no "strong east wind" was speeding on a miraculous errand. Yet, with unfaltering obedience, they boldly stepped forward into the flowing tide; and at the moment when their feet were dipped in its brim, the stream was suddenly divided. The descending waves stayed their course, and rose up in a heap on the one side; while on the other, the seaward current, rapidly subsiding, left an open channel for the passage of the multitude. In the midst of the river the priests halted, while the people, at the word of command, passed on. When the latter were safe on the further bank, and appropriate memorials of the event. had been prepared---one heap of stones having been taken from the center of the river's bed, and reared upon the shore, while another had been piled to note the spot where the ark had lingered in the mid-stream---then were the priests allowed to come from out of Jordan; and no sooner had their exit been effected, than the waters again rushed down at the withdrawal of the temporary and invisible barrier which had arrested them beside Zaretan, and not a track was left to mark the passage where the mighty armament had crossed.

We may especially contemplate the faith exercised by the priests. As they were the first to enter, so they were the last to quit the stream. If there had been danger at all, they would have been the longest exposed to it. By no means short was their interval of suspense and of patient waiting. The armed men and the Levites, the aged and the sick, the women and the children, the tents and furniture, had to wend, their way across a breadth of nearly four-hundred yards. The multitude "hasted," it is true; yet must each moment have seemed tedious to the watchers; and the more so, inasmuch as the mass of waves, restrained by a hand unseen, was threatening at any moment to dash forward, and engulf them in a watery grave. It needed more than a stout heart to keep them firm to their post in such an hour. They had not the excitement of action to divert their thoughts; they stood passive spectators, able fully to realize the perils which environed them, being left at leisure to calculate the

chances of escape, and to weigh them against the apparent probability of death. Their traditionary remembrance of the Red Sea passage, though it testified to God's protecting care, witnessed also to His retributive justice; for the waters which had there stood as an adamantine wall to let the ransomed tribes pass through, had received a commission to drown Pharaoh and his host. How knew Eleazar and his kinsmen that they would be delivered from a similar fate? How knew they that *their* lives would not be sacrificed, after those of the people had been spared? The warrant for their faith was connected with the ark of the covenant, which they bore upon their shoulders. It was the remembrancer of His presence in whose service they were engaged, and at whose command they had thus exposed their lives to seeming danger. Would He at anytime forsake His own? would He forsake them at a time, especially, when they were employed at His bidding, and in obedience to His behest? If not for their own sakes, yet would he not watch over them for the ark's sake? They were consecrated "to bear the vessels of the Lord;" and though they could not plead their perfect purity as a ground of acceptance, they had with them that mercy-seat toward which the sacrificial blood of atonement had some eight-and-thirty times been sprinkled, and above which had dwelt that mysterious effulgence wherein a covenant God had pledged himself to be the protector of His forgiven ones. Without understanding the fullness of its import, they were aware that the ark, with its propitiatory, was in some way a token of that powerful presence which ordinarily resided between the cherubim. Hence, their conviction of safety arose from confidence in Him to whom the ark belonged---a confidence which was not put to shame, though the immediate closing of the water, as they reached the shore, proved that nothing less than supernatural power had availed for their preservation. The same lesson of God's presence was deeply impressed by this transaction on other minds beside those of the priests. "Hereby," said Joshua, "ye shall know that the living God *is among* you;" and the Canaanites themselves heard that *"the Lord* had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel." The Psalmist's interrogation, "What ailed thee, thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?" receives a sufficient answer when he subjoins, "Tremble, thou earth, at *the presence* of the Lord, at *the presence* of the God of Jacob!" Truly" the waters saw thee, Oh God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid; the depths also were troubled." "Thou didst walk through the sea, through the heap of great waters,

thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people."

There is, in the history of every Christian soul, many an incident like this. The believer is often led into the midst of dangers; but there is no need for him to fear. He is not alone; the hand which has guided will also guard him. The covenant holds good in the darkest as well as in the brightest hour. The presence of God is not necessarily withdrawn when the providence of God frowns. Nay, rather, if there are any over whom He watches more intently than others, it is over His chastened ones: and if there is any season when He is willing to draw especially near to the soul, it is in the day of adversity. It is hard to believe this, and therefore hard to realize it. If we trusted more in the abidingness of God's presence, we should experience more of its consoling efficacy. When we let unbelief perturb our hearts, we look away from Him who is at our side; we turn a bewildered gaze upon the tempestuous elements around us, and our fear is heightened to despair; but when we open the ear of faith, we hear the blessed assurance, "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine; when thou passest through the waters, *I will be with thee,* and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee." The menacing waves may rage around us, but they shall not injure, they shall not touch us. We have to pass through them, but we shall pass through in safety: they shall not come in unto our soul. We have with us One whom winds and storms obey. Faith sees Him going first, and it does not hesitate to follow. Faith sees Him take His stand in the open pathway, and *is* encouraged to advance. Faith beholds Him linger there, and forbears to rush unbidden to the further bank. Not one moment does our heavenly Father leave us to brave the peril, untended by His care. If we fail to enjoy the sense of His support, it is because we have let go of Him, not because He has distanced Himself from us.

Not once only, but again and again shall we have to pass through the deep places of earthly trouble and sorrow. Yet again and again shall we find His promise true. He will never leave, no, never forsake them that are His. Every fresh proof of His nearness to sustain and to soothe should strengthen our hearts for the encountering of future difficulties. We can believe, that had the same priests borne the ark a second time through Jordan, within sight of the same multitude, both priests and people would have felt less hesitancy, and a more buoyant confidence, than at a time when they had only received oral

testimony of God's power to control the waves. Thus, from year to year may we put on record renewed proofs of Divine aid afforded us in the hour of our perplexity or desolation, till at length the last of earth's trials shall alone await us, and we shall have but to tread the dark valley, with its cold repellent stream. Then, indeed, may it be truly said to us, "Ye have not passed this way heretofore." We have seen other Christians traversing the flood; and, as far as we could mark their progress, we perceived that the waters were "divided hither and thither," that they might pass over on dry ground. But we could not behold their landing on the further side, nor their glorious admission into the heavenly inheritance. Nay, if we could have seen it, we might not have based our hopes on that as the guarantee of our own safety in following them. Many who tread the intervening gulf that bars us from immortality, are unable to gain a footing, and are swept away into the dark abyss of everlasting perdition. Wherein must our safety, wherein our confidence be found? Only in the presence of our Lord and Master. Assured of that, we may go forward without a single distressful apprehension: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for *thou art with me;* thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."

"When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side;
Songs of praises
I will ever give to thee."

Happy privilege of the Christian, to have the Lord at his right hand in the gloomy hours of life, and the gloomier hour of death! Happy privilege of the Christian alone! The promise, "I will be with thee," is limited to those of whom the Almighty can say, "Thou art mine." To others, He will declare, "I never knew you;" He will leave them to themselves; they will be alone in the troubled day of affliction, alone in the fearful approach of death. No heavenly eye of love will guard them; no heavenly hand of mercy support them; no heavenly voice of authority check the inroad of the dashing billows; no sunbeam of Divine favor gladden their hearts, and irradiate their footpath. Like the Egyptian army, they will essay to ford the strait; and in so doing

they will find their chariot wheels drive heavily, until at length sudden ruin shall come upon them, and that without remedy. It is the chosen people only who pass on with security: it is the presence of God that alone enables them to pass on with composure. Life's sorrows must cross our pathway; and we may not quit our appointed track to avoid them. Be it ours to covet, then, the sole blessing which can carry us triumphantly through; ours to offer the earnest entreaty, "Be not far from me, for trouble is near;" and ours to exclaim, with joyous trustfulness, "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved."

Chapter 7 - The Ark at Jericho; or, God's Presence amid Life's Conflicts

THE ARK AT JERICHO;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE AMID LIFE'S

CONFLICTS.

FROM Jordan the Israelites proceeded to Gilgal, where, for a considerable time, they established their headquarters; but they soon found, that entrance into Canaan did not involve possession of it. The inhabitants of the land were prepared to resist aggression; and the wanderers of the desert found themselves enrolled as warriors for the fight. The town of Jericho was the first which they besieged. Its blockade seemed likely to prove of long continuance, and doubtless would have been so, but for the Divine interposition. Having received explicit directions from the Lord, Joshua commanded the priests to make ready the ark of the covenant for removal. To the people he issued orders, that all who were armed should pass in perfect silence round the city, followed by seven priests sounding a blast on seven rams' horns or jubilee-trumpets; behind these the ark was to be carried, while the rearward, composed (it would seem) of those untrained or disabled for warfare, closed the procession, which wound its way completely round the walls, at a sufficient distance, probably, to avoid exposure to the arrows of the townsmen. The task ended, the ark was replaced in its former site, and the people again lodged in the camp at Gilgal. Great must have been the wonder excited by a requisition so unwonted and so unintelligible. The fact that no word was allowed to "proceed out of their mouth," had given them abundant opportunity for quiet reflection; and at even-tide we cannot but believe that the subject afforded ample theme for the interchange of conjectures. They doubted not that an explanation would come. Joshua had hinted that there would be a time when he should bid them shout; and in that hint lay an ample basis for encouragement and hope. Early on the second day, the same order was repeated, save that two circuits were enjoined instead of one. On the

third day, the people had to compass the city three times; and so to increase the length of their march, day by day, for an entire week. No positive declaration had yet been publicly uttered concerning the result of their movements; and the interval must have appeared long ere that result was manifest. But on the seventh day, after having risen" with the dawn of light, and fulfilled their seven rounds, Joshua said, "Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city . . . . so the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the ,sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people " went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city."

Eight-and-twenty times, in all, had Jericho been compassed: and we are naturally led to ask, what could be the cause of so long a delay. A little reflection easily discovers obvious marks of wisdom in the arrangement. It served for a test of the people's faith, and obedience, and patience, and perseverance; as well as for a token that the victory was won by Divine, and not by human agency. First, it put Israel to the proof. It was a trial as to whether their faith would be constant, their obedience implicit, their patience unwearied, and their perseverance steadfast. Their evil hearts, prompted by the tempter's suggestions, might often have inclined them to swerve from the line of duty. Its apparent uselessness would each day strengthen the temptation to inquire, "Why prosecute so fruitless a task? why walk, when fighting would prove more effectual? why compass the city, instead of taking it by assault? "Thus *faith* would have failed, and human wisdom been deemed more worthy of confidence than the Divine. The fear of ridicule, moreover, on the part of the Canaanites who watched them from the city walls, might have disposed them to say," We shall just get laughed at for our pains; let us desist from a procedure that will tend to lower us in the esteem of the inhabitants of the land." Thus*obedience* would have been laid aside, and the heavenly mandate despised. Excessive eagerness might have led them to say, "Let us go twice or thrice for every single journey that is enjoined on us; and if, at the last, our shouting is to be the harbinger of conquest, let us shout at once; so shall we hasten the looked-for end." Thus *patience* would have faltered, and the Lord's time not have been deemed the best. Weariness might have led them to exclaim, "If the work is to depend on the ark, let that be

carried round alone, and let us henceforth be spared the toil; or, if it is to depend on us, let us leave the ark undisturbed in the tabernacle, that our progress be no longer fruitlessly retarded by what is in that case a mere encumbrance." Thus would *perseverance* have been lacking, and the palm of victory forfeited. Secondly: there was doubtless an intention to demonstrate that the capture of the city was not by might or power of man, but through the sovereign will and work of God. The walls might have fallen as easily on the first day as on the seventh; but had it been thus decreed, the people might have imagined the foundations of it so weak, that their own martial tread had sufficed to effect its overthrow. But day by day they moved round it, and more and more each day, while yet the wall stood as unshaken as at the first. Not till the appointed time did it fall---the time privately foretold to Joshua at the outset---the time which no human sagacity could have calculated---the time which was signaled by the mere raising of a human shout,---from multitudinous voices, it is true, yet insufficient to cause a vibration such as might rend the high-towering defenses of a city" walled up to heaven." The apostle tells us, that "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days." In each foot-fall might have been heard the echo of that faith; but its noble outburst resounded in the cry of victory. "Shout," said Joshua, "for the Lord HATH given you the city." No sign attested the truthfulness of the assertion; no probability was discernible of its speedy fulfillment: but, resting on the word of implied promise, accepting the boon as though already possessed, rejoicing in the triumph as though completely achieved, they raised the joyous shout of an assured success. Its actual attainment was immediate; and it was complete. The city, in just punishment of its iniquities, was devoted to destruction; and its spoil, which had not been gained by the people's efforts, was to be reserved for the treasury of the Lord. He it was who had been represented by the ark of the covenant: "the priests," says the inspired historian, "passed on *before the Lord,* and the ark of the covenant of the Lord followed them."

(*This identification of the ark with Jehovah himself is of frequent occurrence in Scripture, and strongly confirms the close connection of it with His immediate presence. Such instances are found in Josh. iv. 13; comp. 6 j 2 Sam. vii. 2; comp, 5, 6; and Ex. xvi. 33; comp. 34.)*

It was before Him, and by His power, that the walls fell down flat. Without

His aid, the people might have walked round the city their lives long, and been not one whit nearer to the seizure of the town.

The subject teaches us the presence of God in our conflicts. He is the God of armies, and can alone lead forth our hosts to successful warfare. He does not require from our regiments, any more than He ever again required from Israel's armament, that they should compass a besieged city, telling its towers, and marking its bulwarks, and waiting for its miraculous downfall. But He does require that so long as the evils of war subsist, Christian nations should recognize Him as the arbiter of destinies, and the commander of deliverances, "Help us, Oh Lord our God! for we rest on Thee, and in Thy name we go forth against this multitude," should be the initial prayer of every battle. "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God," should be the motto inscribed on every banner. "It may be that the Lord will work for us," should be the basis of every hope. "Hitherto the Lord hath helped us," should be the memorial of every conquest.

It is, however, more particularly on our spiritual conflicts that we would wish to enlarge. If we are God's people, we are called to fight our way to the heavenly Canaan. Let us stand beneath the walls of ancient Jericho, and learn a seasonable lesson. Are we placing ourselves in the way of temptation, and courting the attacks of the foe? This is to walk so near the enemy's walls as to keep within constant range of his missiles. Are we looking for victory over temptation without any exertion on our own part? That were like tarrying in our tents, while we left the ark to be carried round as our proxy and substitute, converting the token which bespoke God's presence into a subterfuge to excuse our own indolence. Are we professing to resist temptation, while secretly heedless whether we gain the mastery or not? that were to act the part of one, who might have figured in the foremost ranks, but neglected to equip himself in armor, and so betrayed his lukewarmness in the cause. Are we resisting temptation in our own strength? that were indeed to walk round the city resolutely and perseveringly, but to walk round it without the ark of the covenant, without the presence of the Lord of hosts, and therefore unsuccessfully. Are we wearied with the protracted demand for patience, and disposed to repine because the end is yet deferred? that is to murmur, because seven days' work is not done in one. We must bear in mind,

that victory over temptation, even with God's help, is not the work of a day. We must keep at our post; we must watch and pray, watch unremittingly and pray without ceasing, hour by hour, day by day, year by year. But, lastly, are we putting forth our constant endeavors, and asking importunately for heavenly assistance, while yet conscious of inward misgivings as to whether our labor shall not have been fruitless, and our supplications vain? that is as if we sedulously went through the appointed march or marches of each consecutive day, but refused to raise a shout until permitted to enjoy a full and final triumph. Such disheartenment is treason to our King. We must honor Him, or He will not honor us. To doubt the victory because of our own weakness, is either to view the matter as taken out of His hands, or else it is to distrust His power. His promise has been given, and

"The feeblest saint

Shall win the day,

Though death and hell

Obstruct the way."

Temptation is growing weaker, though at present we perceive it not; and ere long the signal shall be given, the enemy's fortress shall be destroyed, and the palm-branch be placed in our hand. In the meanwhile, it behooves us to join our fellow-believers, our fellow-soldiers, in raising the anticipative chorus of thanksgiving. The presence of sin makes us repeatedly sigh forth the complaint, "Oh, wretched man that I am!"---the remains of unbelief often incline us to ask in a desponding tone, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"--- but the charter of our Christian privileges gives us the right to meet this inquiry with the joyous answer, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Thus, also, in reference to our final conflict:---"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death;" but even before he approaches, we may sing, "Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ;" and thus we may even now give utterance to the Hallelujah of the redeemed.

Chapter 8 - The Ark at Gilgal; or, God's Presence Detective of Sin

THE ARK AT GILGAL;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE DETECTIVE OF SIN.

THE next section of the Israelites' history brings the ark before us in a new aspect. For the first time we have a somewhat detailed account of its being used as an oracle. The scene is still in the old encampment, to the east, or rather south-east of Jericho. The silence which reigns around is broken only by the voice of lamentation. The gloom that is settled on every countenance tells of national sorrow. There is a group assembled at the tabernacle-gate. They are not of the favored tribe; they have no right to enter the sacred precincts; they have taken their station no nearer than the law permits. Their faces are turned toward that holy ark which they cannot behold; they are prostrate on the ground in the attitude of lowly reverence; they have rent their garments, and put dust on their heads, in sign of abasement and grief. Joshua himself is there, and with him the elders of Israel. Hour after hour passes, till "even-tide" has set in; but the mourning suppliants continue with their faces to the ground "before the ark of the Lord." The leader's voice is heard, pleading, "Alas! Oh Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!" These words betoken a sadly ruffled spirit, a state of heart which has led to the momentary forgetfulness of the marvelous things God had wrought. Yet the very mention of Jordan seems to have awakened the recollection of Divine mercy, and to have superinduced a better state of feeling'. He desists from the strain of discontent, and proceeds to unfold the cause of his grief: "Oh Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!" He breathes out his whole soul without restraint; and having alluded to failure in the past, he adverts to his fear for the future: "The Canaanites and all the

inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth." Then he urges a short but effectual plea, "What wilt thou do unto Thy great name?" Prayer has already worked its first, its reflex benefit: it has banished his selfish murmurings, and swallowed up his personal dissatisfaction in earnest zeal for the honor of the Most High. But it has also penetrated within the veil; it has come into the ear of Him whose dwelling is between the cherubim; and a response is given from the Holiest of all. The Divine message is a rousing one: "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?" The urgency of the case calls for immediate action, not, indeed, in the way of fighting, but in searching out the reason of the late defeat. If Israel has been vanquished, there was a cause for it, and that cause must be removed: "Up, sanctify the people!" Their transgression is specified: they have taken of the prohibited spoil of Jericho, and concealed it among their own stuff: "therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed." A solemn denunciation follows: "neither will I be with you anymore, except ye destroy the accursed from among you." Measures must be taken to discover the delinquent. The Omniscient One could pronounce his name at once; but this would give him no space for repentance, no scope for voluntary confession. His own mind, and the minds of all the people, must be impressed with a conviction of the enormity which characterized his crime.

With the morning light, Israel is summoned to be in attendance. Tribe after tribe comes forward; but when Judah passes the tabernacle-door, it is marked out as guilty. The other eleven tribes are relieved of a burden of anxiety; but, over this one, the dark cloud lowers yet more portentously. Family after family of Judah's tribe are presented for acquittal or condemnation; the sentence falls on that of the Zarhites, while the Shelanites, Hezronites, and Hamulites are free. The guilty family of Zerah is next divided into households, and the eldest branch is indicated as the transgressor. Zabdi brings his house forward by individuals, and his grandson Achan is revealed as the man who had been "the troubler of Israel."

We can hardly form to ourselves an adequate picture of the emotions with which the sinner's heart must have been agitated, while this solemn scrutiny was made, and while the circle, of which he knew himself to be the center, was growing still narrower and more narrow. During the lone hours of the

night his meditations had not been such as had led him to come forth and own his guilt. More probably he had revolved the possibilities of escaping detection, and had successfully buoyed himself up with the false hope of secrecy. He may have thought of the act, as unwitnessed by human eye; of the property, as concealed beneath the earth-floor of his tent. He may have dreamed, that the search would prove futile; and hence, when the hour of investigation was come, he was able to stand in his wonted place, with an undaunted mien, and with a cheek unblanched. Scarcely could he fail to experience a thrill of terror, when he found that the presentation was to be before the tabernacle, before the ark, before the Lord. Though he looked not within the veil, he knew what was there concealed, and what that shrine imported. But sin has both a hardening and a blinding effect upon the soul. Achan felt not toward the ark as once he had felt; else he could not have maintained his sullen and persevering silence. Again must a pang of conscience have been endured, when his own tribe was pointed out, and he knew it to be a truthful

verdict; but he was resolved to brave it still. The unerring selection of his own family must have come with yet fiercer assault upon the fortress of his obstinacy; at the taking of his father's house, he must have felt that the fabric, in which he had placed his trust, was hopelessly demolished; and when at length he himself had to stand forth before the thousands of Israel, as the man whose cupidity and disobedience had provoked the Lord to anger, and had brought disgrace upon the nation, he began to realize the hateful consequences of his guilt. Was his sin worth the intense torture of that struggle between fading hope and growing fear? Was it worth what he had yet to endure?

Urged by Joshua, but not stimulated by any promise of pardon, he made the tardy confession of his guilt. If a lurking idea of possible forgiveness prompted the candid avowal and the minute detail, no such expectation had been warranted by the legislator's words; "My son," said Joshua, "give, I pray thee, glory to the God of Israel, and make confession unto Him." It was too late for penitence to obtain a reversal of his earthly doom; but words of acknowledgment were desirable, in order to vindicate before the congregation of Israel the perfect justice of their Divine Sovereign. For the further satisfaction of the people, the stolen articles were produced in confirmation of

Achan's guilt, and laid "before the Lord," as though in token to Him who dwelt within the veil, that the people offered a national confession for the sin which had been brought to light in their midst. The offender, with all that pertained to him, was stoned with stones, and committed to the destroying flame. Then was the face of the Lord turned again toward His people, and Ai with her king given into their hand.

We are reminded that the presence of God detects our every disobedience. We may for a while forget it, as Achan forgot the holy ark; but sooner or later we shall be made sensible of it. "Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God: for the day of the Lord is at hand; . . . . and it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil." If we are cherishing a single known sin---if we are cleaving to any forbidden object---we shall be unwilling to think of the eye that rests upon us; we shall wrap ourselves up in a mantle of self-delusion, and fancy that it screens us from Omniscience; we shall close our eyes to the light, and then imagine ourselves hidden by the darkness. As Achan might possibly have deemed that the curtain which concealed the ark from him served also to conceal him from the God whose presence it accompanied; even so, because our eyes cannot pierce the blue veil above us, and peer into the heavenly realms, we are too apt to think, though we should blush to say, "How doth God know? can He judge through the dark cloud?" Willing or unwilling, we must one day awake to the full consciousness of our guilt; we must one day be made to feel the revealing power of God's presence. Some there are who, like the son of Carmi, harden themselves against it to the last; who determinately hold back the confession of their guilt, who stay themselves with false assurances of safety, and cry, "Peace, peace! where there is no peace." Yet, however skillfully they may have cloaked their sin, however deeply they may have buried it out of the reach of man's discovery, however unwilling they may have been to come to the light, lest their deeds should be reproved, they will be brought before the Judge at the last day, to answer for their iniquities, in the view of their assembled fellow-creatures. A vaster throng will then be gathered than were convened in the vicinity of Achor. Men of divers races, nations, ranks, and pedigrees, will be there; yet all must appear" before the Lord," to be judged according to the deeds they have done.

Nor shall a single guilty one escape. All who are under the condemnation of the law, shall endure the execution of its sentence. The Judge will have been the Witness; and the workers of iniquity shall be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power."

But all are sinners. Must such judgment, then, be pronounced against all? Nay; there will be a multitude whom no man can number, who will be received into the joy of their Lord. They have not been sinless, but they" have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They have been taught to put away sin as "the abominable thing" which God hates; they have not continued to "roll it as a sweet morsel under the tongue;" they have not been "treasuring up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath; " but they have been washed, and justified, and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Holy Spirit of God. Their position at the last will resemble that of the tribes, and families, and households who were presented before the Lord, and accepted as innocent. These had not kept the Divine law perfectly; and it may be that many a tender conscience among them had been bowed down with the fear lest some "secret fault" should rise up in judgment against them. But they were not willfully harboring the accursed thing. All their known guilt had been penitently confessed over the head of the trespass-offering, and for their sins of ignorance had many a young bullock been laid on the sacrificial altar. Not against them, nor for their sakes, had the wrath of the Lord gone out. The presumptuous, impenitent, unforgiven sinner was the one who had sole cause for alarm. All else might safely say, with a holy confidence, "Let my sentence come forth from thy presence."

Would we wish to utter such a sentiment? Let us walk constantly in close communion with God. His presence, daily realized, will daily reveal to us more and more of the plague of our own heart; but will do so in order to the healing of the distemper. In the sanctuary, also, "are the secrets of the heart made manifest;" but it is well for us that it should be so. If we "walk in the light," we shall detect spots upon our robe; but" the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." If we walk in the darkness, we shall deceive ourselves, and may not awake until it shall be too late to seek and find the remedy. Achan, during the interval between his crime and his conviction, must either have absented himself from the ceremonies of the tabernacle, or have observed them as a mere form. Had he entered into their design, he

would have confessed his guilt, renounced the ill-obtained treasure, and besought the cancelling of his sin. The choice lies open before us, whether we will follow his example, and cleave to our own ways, and keep aloof from God now, so as hereafter to be constrained to lift an unavailing cry to the rocks and mountains to fall on us, and hide us from His face,---or whether we will welcome Jehovah's inspection, and offer the prayer, " Search me, Oh God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting!"

Chapter 9 - The Ark at Ebal and Gerizim; or, God's Presence in the Reading of the Word

THE ARK AT EBAL AND GERIZIM
OR,
GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE READING
OF THE WORD.

THE taking of Ai, and the discomfiture of the army from Bethel, had left an open road toward Shechem; and Joshua availed, himself of the facility thus afforded for performing that which Moses had assigned as the first duty of the Israelites on entering Canaan. Deut. xi. 29; xxvii. 4. Twice had the deceased lawgiver insisted on the observance of this service; and his successor in office could not but feel desirous to seize the earliest possibility of fulfilling it. *Josh. viii. 30-35.* The appointed spot was the fertile valley which runs between the precipitous acclivities of two mountain-heights, Ebal towering on the north, and Gerizim on the south. In the center of this plain, ere reaching the transverse vale of Moreh, which lay beyond the defile, the ark of the covenant of the Lord was stationed; while the tribes of Israel, including even the women and children, were drawn up in array, six on either side. The ground below Mount Gerizim was occupied by Simeon, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, Benjamin, and such of the Levites as were not in immediate attendance on the ark; while Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali, were stationed at the foot of Ebal. *Deut. Xxvii. 12, 13.* The ministering Levites gave distinct utterance to the curses; and as each was severally pronounced, the occupiers of Ebal responded with the "Amen" which tokened their submission. The blessings, also, were proclaimed, and the audible acceptance of these was assigned to the opposite party at the base of Gerizim. The formula of the benedictions has not been recorded; but it is no improbable surmise, that they were in strict antithesis to the prescribed list of cursings, The latter were twelve in number, eleven of them being directed

against special crimes, and the last being of a general nature: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them·" *Deut. xxvii. 14-26.* Appropriately, therefore, did Joshua "afterward" read "all the words of the law," not omitting "a word of all that Moses commanded." The people were thus instructed as to all that God enjoined; while again they were reminded of the benefits that would follow obedience to His will, and the evils that would attend a rejection of His claims. They heard of temporal punishments and temporal rewards, that would rest on them in the city and in the field, in their coming in and their going out, in their families, their farms, their possessions,' and their political relations. Deut. xxviii. "Life and good, death and evil," were again distinctly set before them; and they were once more exhorted to "choose life, that both they and their seed might live." *Deut xxx. 15-19.* They must have felt that it was "not a vain thing" for them, but that it *was*their" life." *Deut. xxxii. 47.* They looked upon the purple-draped burden that lay between their companies, and remembered the majesty of Him who had condescended to be there enshrined. They looked upward to the bleak and craggy summits of the ancient heights around them, and called to mind the power of Him who had laid the foundation of those everlasting hills. They looked upon the thinly-scattered, gloomy-leaved olives, that relieved not the desolateness of Mount Ebal's savage grandeur, and witnessed an emblem of the sterility to which their fairest pasturages might be doomed. They looked upon the citron and pomegranate groves, which, in their vernal bloom, then decked the lower slopes of Gerizim, and recognized a token of the fertile luxuriance that might yet make even their deserts to rejoice. But was this all they could behold? Had it been so, they might well have gone away with dejected countenance and drooping heart. The law was rigorous, the commandment exceeding broad; but man is weak,---and man is prone to evil; how, then, could the former be kept? how could the latter avoid the penal curse, and how win the promised blessing? The eye rested again on Ebal, and there it discerned a smoking" altar," which spoke of accepted offerings, of justice satisfied, of mercy waiting to be gracious. The desponding soul might again exult in hope, the anxious brow be smoothed, and the face become once more radiant with beaming gladness. Thus, in the vicinity of Shechem, had the temple of nature become a temple wherein Revelation uttered its enlightening voice, and wherein sacrifice unfolded its tidings of consolation. The Hebrews had not to feel after God, if haply they might find Him. They

had not to ask in their heart," Who shall ascend into heaven?" or "Who shall descend into the deep?" for the word was nigh them, brought nigh in its public proclamation---the law, brought nigh to lay its embargo on sin, and to furnish its incentives to holiness; and the gospel, brought nigh in the shed blood of holocausts and peace-offerings, as typical of the provision made for the world's redemption.

The precepts, which were thus read in the people's hearing, were also transcribed in their sight. Great stones having been set up and formed into a pillar, were plastered over, to secure an even surface on which the words, probably of the Decalogue, or (as others think) the closing chapters of Deuteronomy, were inscribed in legible characters, while Israel looked on, and traced the progress of Joshua's graving-tool. Word by word, the letter of the law came full into view. Thus were the multitude left without excuse. The ear and eye were alike instructed. The blind had the opportunity of listening, the deaf had the advantage of perusing. None might plead ignorance of the statute. This memorial-column spoke also of perpetuity. It suggested the idea, that the spoken words were not to melt in air, not to die away in empty sound, not to perish in the utterance;---that they were of lasting obligation, of continuous application. None might plead that the code was of a by-gone date, given in Sinai with a view to the nomadic life of the desert, and inappropriate to the possessors of the goodly land. The impressiveness of the occasion, and of its diverse occurrences, was well-fitted to exert a solemn and a permanent effect on the hearts of the people: and it seems to have answered the design, for "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua." Not till a younger generation gained the predominance,---a generation who had not seen the wonders or felt the mighty influences of the transactions that marked the entrance to Canaan,---was the law of God openly violated.

It were well for us, if we shared more in the feeling which that day pervaded the families of Jacob. Our advantages, are not less than theirs. As Nature testified to them of "the goodness and severity of God," so it does to us. As they had a Revelation, so have we. As their revelation met both eye and ear, so does ours. We may gaze upon it for ourselves, and we may listen to its oral proclamation. As their revelation told of God's requirements and of man's duty, as it pointed out the way of life and the way of death, as it held forth

threatenings to warn and promises to allure, even so does the Word which God hath spoken to us in these latter days. And as the burnt offerings, on their altar of unhewn stone, told of God's forgiving mercy, so have we heard of His love unspeakable in sending His own Son to be a propitiation for human guilt. But do we listen to the message with reverent attention? do we receive it with obedient faith? We hear the blessing pronounced, "he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life;" does our "Amen" welcome the assurance, and does our daily life bear witness to the sincerity of that Amen? We hear the curse which follows, "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life:" do we assent to this, as perfectly just and equitable? and does our implicit confidence in the Savior of sinners prove that ours has not been the assent merely of the understanding? Do we feel what we read and hear of God's Holy Book? does every sentence of it sink deep into our heart,---as deep, as if we were reading or hearing it for the first time beneath the shadow of Ebal and of Gerizim? Why should it not be so?

We imagine two excuses may be started, both fallacious. We may be told that this was a solitary occasion; that novelty added largely to its charm; and that what we hear from Sabbath to Sabbath, and read from day to day, cannot be expected to come with so much force to the heart. Is this a valid plea? We are aware that, as a general rule, "familiarity breeds contempt;" but should it be so in reference to the things of God? If the Most High stoops to address us, and has patience to do this time after time, ought not each fresh instance of His long suffering to arouse a more eager intentness on our part, lest we let slip what we hear? When GOD speaks, can we ever deem his voice a familiar one? when He renews His invitations, can we venture to listen with indifference? when He reiterates His warnings, can we dare to call the message wearisome? If He had but *one* truth, and sent it always couched in *one* and the same form, the fact that He needs to send, and that He deigns to send it *more than once*, should be a sufficient motive to call forth our every power to aid in its immediate reception. Yet this is not all. He does not send us only line upon line, and precept upon precept, nor only here a little and there a little. He has furnished us with such a record of His will, that a protracted lifetime, devoted to its closest scrutiny, could never exhaust its fullness. It is a well that can never run dry, a mine that can never be worked out. Every careful and prayerful perusal of it will send us away with some

new idea learned, some new light acquired, some new stimulus gained. If the charm of novelty is requisite, it exists abundantly in the treasure-house of sacred truth.

But further, it may be urged, that the outward array and pomp and circumstance of this high religious festival favored its hold upon the minds of the Israelites, and that the ark is not with us as it was with them. The fact itself is true, but we may not draw from it a false conclusion. What if the external show be absent, are we not thereby left to pay a more undistracted attention to the solemn words which should engross our thoughts? What if the ark be lacking, have we not in our midst that which the consecrated chest was designed to symbolize? The ark was nothing save as God dwelt with it; and is not His presence as great a reality at this day as it ever was? do we not know that He is present wherever the volume of His Word is studied? We know it well. Let us seek to realize it. Let us never hear a Bible-truth, or read a Scripture-verse, without remembering,---God is here: the writer of the inspired book, the giver of the holy law, the originator of the wondrous gospel, the author of salvation's scheme,---He is present; He is cognizant of the portion of truth now brought before me; He is witness that I have heard it,---therefore I cannot plead that I knew not His will; He searches my heart, and sees whether I am seeking to understand,---therefore I cannot plead that the revelation was too dim to light me heavenward; He sees whether I am desirous to render an unreserved obedience,---therefore I cannot plead that His law was too rigorous to be observed ;---He is here; yes, He is here, not only as a witness, but also as a dispenser of the blessing and of the curse ;---even now, if my heart is stubborn, my will rebellious, my desires going out after evil, the curse already rests upon me; there is disquiet in the heart, and sooner or later there will be affliction in the cup ;---but even now, if my heart is melted, my will subdued, my affections won to holiness, the benediction will have begun; there will be peace within, and it will be followed by all salutary peace without! Thus let us set ourselves to realize that God is with His Word, and with us in the perusal of it; then shall we not be among the number of those who shall say to Him, "Lord, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets;" but to whom He will say, "I know you not, whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity!"

Chapter 10 - The Ark at Shiloh; or, God's Presence Directive in Perplexity

THE ARK AT SHILOH;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE DIRECTIVE IN

PERPLEXITY.

WHEN the solemnities of Mount Ebal were over, and the feast on the peace-offerings had been concluded, the ark was taken back to the camp at Gilgal, where it had a settled abode until the cessation of war enabled its establishment in the town divinely appointed as its more permanent resting place. So soon, however, as the tranquil possession of the entire land was obtained, "the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there;"*Josh. xviii. 1.*, for there Jehovah "set His name at the first," *Jer. Vii.12.*, and there He continued to tabernacle among men until the days of Eli. The choice of this spot was doubtless regulated by its central position, which secured its safety in a mode somewhat similar to that of its preservation in the midst of the desert encampments; and which also rendered it equally accessible to all the remoter tribes, when they had to repair thither for annual festivals or private vows. Its situation, in the territory assigned to Ephraim, marked its peculiar suitability as a place of resort for the chief legislator, who was himself of that tribe. Henceforward it was at Shiloh alone that sacrifice might be presented, because it was here alone that the presence of God was enthroned. *Deut. xii. 11-14.*, We accordingly find no record of acceptable sacrifice being offered elsewhere during the location of the ark in this city, save on occasion of any special manifestations of divinity in the person of the Angel of the covenant; As *Judg. vi. 22-24; xiii. 16-23.*, the exception thus proving and confirming the rule, the former having reference to the extraordinary, the latter to the ordinary revealment of Jehovah's presence.

The incidents connected with the ark's sojourn of more than three centuries at Shiloh are not numerous. It was, for the most part, a time of rest and of peace. The first use made of it was for the appointment by lot, of the territorial

boundaries, which should mark the distinct tribal domains. *Josh. xviii. 8-10.*, Seven of these divisions were yet unapportioned, but on a diligent survey and accurate sketch of the land, Joshua cast lots in Shiloh "before the Lord," thus committing the choice of a settled habitation in Canaan to the same divine Guide, who had so constantly and so wisely marked out the bounds of their temporary stations in the wilderness.

Another assembly was convened, on the report, that the trans-Jordanic tribes had sinned in rearing an altar as though with the intention of presenting sacrifice in another than the appointed place. So public a transgression of an express law might not pass unpunished. " When the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together to go up to war against them." *Josh. xxii. 12-33*. The convenience of Shiloh, as a rendezvous, was not the only cause of its being made their place of assembly. In meeting there, they met before the Lord, commending to Him their enterprise, and seeking from Him counsel and success. The spirit of wisdom was poured out upon them, in answer doubtless to their prayers. They embarked not rashly on the fearful necessity of war; they sent forth a deputation of inquiry, and were satisfied to learn that the object which had occasioned their anxiety, was not designed for a sacrificial, but for a commemorative altar. Their thankfulness arose in strains of grateful praise, and when we are told that "the children of Israel blessed God," we perceive the advantage which their presence in Shiloh would afford them for expressing their joy in the eucharistic offerings of the Levitical law.

It seems clear, that the noble testimony breathed in Joshua's last public speech was uttered in presence of the tabernacle. *Josh. xxiv. 1, 26.* Whether, as some, suggest, we are to read "Shiloh" for" Shechem," as the place of convocation,---or whether, in this instance, there had been an exceptional transference of the "sanctuary" to another than its appointed site,---has been disputed. The latter, however, seems a very probable supposition. As no word is spoken of sacrifices, the law which forbade their being offered, save in the one chosen place, was not violated; and there might be some appropriateness in Joshua's closing his public life by convening the people, and once more bringing the ark itself to the neighborhood of that spot, where once had been conducted a service yet more solemn and imposing. We dwell not on this transaction, because no express mention is made of the ark: else we might

have found a useful lesson in the connection between our decision for God and our belief in His presence. It is too often a failure in the latter that induces the total absence, or the mere half-heartedness, of the former. It is when we feel that the Almighty One is with us, to strengthen as well as to search us, that we can fearlessly say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

During the time of the Judges, it is but once that we have any information concerning the tabernacle's most precious treasure. The event must have transpired not very long after the death of Joshua, since we know that Eleazar's son still occupied the high priest's office. It was a period when no ruler was executing justice among the people, when every man was doing that which was right in his own eyes, and lawless insubordination was universally prevalent. We hasten over the preliminary circumstances which introduce this portion of the narrative. Suffice it to say, that the Benjamites had committed a series of glaring offences against travelers who had lodged one night in Gibeah, on their way to "the house of the Lord" at Shiloh. The matter had been reported to the remaining tribes, whereupon in fitting indignation "the whole congregation was gathered together as one man" in Mizpeh. The proofs of guilt were too evident to require investigation. Swift chastisement was the unanimous verdict passed by the assembled multitude. They had no doubt as to the duty of entering on warfare; they hesitated only as to the mode of doing it. In their perplexity, therefore, they betook themselves to the divine oracle. They "arose, and went up"---perhaps, by deputation---" to the house of God, and asked counsel." *Judg. xx. 18-28.* There has been much controversy as to the place whither they repaired for the purpose. Some commentators, following the guidance of Josephus, consider that the expression "house of God" should, in this narrative, have been left untranslated; and they accordingly conclude that for some cause, probably for the convenience of the army, the ark alone, or the ark and tabernacle, had been moved to "Bethel." [It is true that the *usual* designation of the sanctuary was Beth-Elohira, or, Beth-Jehovah, and not Beth-El; but even Rosenmiller (who has been cited in support of the above argument) unhesitatingly admits that the latter term is applied to the temple in Zech. vii. 2.] Others think that the mysterious shrine had been taken to Mizpeh; and they deduce this from the statement, that the congregation were gathered "unto the Lord,"---a

phrase, however, which may have been used only to denote that they entered on this as a religious duty, undertaken in Jehovah's fear, and that they met together as a host assembled to do Him service by vindicating the cause of the injured, and taking revenge upon the evil-doers. The third, the most generally received, and in our view the simplest interpretation, is that which considers the ark to have remained quietly at Shiloh. The situation of this town toward the southern part of Ephraim's territory, which was the tribe immediately adjacent to the theater of war, made it sufficiently accessible, without the need of such removal as only a peculiar exigency could warrant. The phrase "the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days," has indeed given some color to the idea, that it was not in its usual locality; but the sentence may also be satisfactorily explained, as the comment of a writer who lived after the time of Shiloh's final abandonment, and who thus reminded his readers that things had not always been as they were in his day, that once the tabernacle, had not been empty, that once the ark had not been secluded in the dwelling of a private family. The propriety of referring these transactions to Shiloh, is further confirmed by the declarations of the ensuing chapter: the Israelites having come to the house of God, and poured out their sorrows into Jehovah's listening ear, "rose early on the morrow, and built *there* an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings." *Judg. xxi. 1-4*. This, without an express warrant from Heaven, they would have had no right to do elsewhere than in the appointed place, where God had recorded his name; and in strict harmony, therefore, with the inference to which this leads us, is the mention immediately made of the virgins of Jabesh-gilead as having been brought "unto the camp to *Shiloh."* The whole narrative seems clear, if we adopt the idea, that during the conflict the Israelites occasionally repaired thither to seek advice in the chosen place of divine manifestation, and after the victory took up a position beside what was then the ecclesiastical capital of their land.

But it is more important for us to study the circumstances, than to determine the scene of their occurrence. Four times was the ark visited; once in connection with each of the three great battle days that marked this civil war, and once at its conclusion. On the first occasion, the act was one *of homage, of humility, and of confidence.* "Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin?" Here was an acknowledgment of God's

sovereignty, a confession of their own inadequacy to form a competent judgment, and an expression of trust in that divine wisdom which could give them unerring guidance. They were in difficulty as to who among them must take the lead. Let authority be unduly assumed, and discord would ensue; but let authority be conferred from heaven, and all would render a cheerful obedience. The appeal was not made in vain. An answer was vouchsafed. Judah was appointed to the post of honor and of danger. With next day's light, the array of battle was drawn up against Gibeah; but the result proved unfavorable to the men of Israel, who left two and twenty thousand slain upon the field.

Again they had recourse to the ark; this time, *with grief, with perseverance, and with tenderness of heart.* They went not with the cold and callous words of a formal and businesslike question, They "went up, and wept before the Lord." It was an earnest work on which they had entered; they had been made sensible of its stern reality; they had been pierced through with many sorrows. Their sanguine hopes had received a sudden check; their keen expectations of victory had given place to the humiliation of defeat; some of their bravest warriors were laid low in the dust. But not for a moment did they think that God was powerless to aid them, or that it was useless to inquire His will. To Him they hastened in their distress; on Him they cast their burden; before Him they tarried to receive further instruction. They wept before the Lord "until even," persistent in their desire, and importunate in their request for celestial guidance. It was a new question they proposed: "Shall I go up again to battle?" In the first instance, they had thought the path of duty clear; now they distrusted their own judgment. They asked not how they should go, but whether they should go at all. The tone of their question was changed as well as its purport: "Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother?" The closing word indicated a subdued state of feeling; their own affliction had awakened their compassion for others; they had felt some of the sad results which war entails on the conquered; they shrank from making those who were of their own kin endure what now themselves were suffering; they owned the relationship which, in their earlier excitement, they had well nigh, if not wholly, forgotten. Their zeal had been mixed with much of mere emotional impulse; but now the "strange fire" was extinguished. This revived affection, however, was not

such as involved any connivance at sin. If it was needful that Benjamin be attacked, they were still prepared to address themselves boldly to the task. The response given to them was as emphatic as it was brief: "Go up against him." There was no promise of conquest, no pledge even of safety; but there was a command, and that was enough. They "encouraged themselves, and set their battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day." Once again, however, they were worsted in the fight; the Benjamites slew eighteen thousand of their troops; and when they returned to the encampment, it was found that in two days' slaughter one-tenth of the four hundred thousand who had made up the original army at Mizpeh had been cut off. To the house of God they went a third time; and it was now *with unanimity, with penitence, and with submissiveness of will.* No mere deputation was sent; "all the children of Israel and all the people" joined in the exercise. Everyone, who had to engage in the combat, felt the need of supplication, and such as could not fight, had yet the ability to pray. Their sorrow was as deep as before; again" they wept." It was as earnest as on the previous day; again they" sat there before the Lord until even." It was far more penitent than it had been; they now "fasted," and "offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord." Self-confidence was cast out---sin confessed reconciliation sought---sacrifice presented. They remembered, that to be "smitten before the enemy" was one of the curses pronounced in the law of Moses; they knew that the curse rested only on those who were chargeable with guilt; they awoke to a sense of their depravity and a remembrance of their manifold short-comings. They would approach God still, but it should be with sacrificial blood. They would come, not as righteous, but as sinners. They would crave mercy, ere they besought assistance. Encouraged by the completion of these rites, they proposed a third question: "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease?" The addition of this alternative, "or shall I cease?" denoted their perfect willingness to leave the decision entirely with God. It showed that they made no reservation, that they resigned all choice of their own, that they were prepared submissively to welcome all God's will. Pride would have whispered, "No; it is impossible to cease; our dignity must be maintained." But submission said, "There is no dignity in sin---no dignity in obstinately pursuing a wrong course---no dignity in unkindness to a neighbor---no dignity in disobedience to God." Setting aside all party-feeling,

all self-willed preference, they manifested their readiness to act or to desist, to fight or to forbear, to continue or to close the battle, just as God might appoint. Such is the state of mind which He approves, and which He delights to honor. The broken and contrite heart He will not despise. The renewed command came forth, "Go up;" but with it was given also the definite promise, "for tomorrow I will deliver them into thine hand." To Gibeah they retraced their steps; but laid their plan of military operations with more sagacity and skill. Either through express directions from God by the medium of Phinehas the priest, or through a spirit of wisdom divinely infused into their generals, or through a remembrance of the orders given to Joshua at Ai, an ambush was contrived, a rapid flight was feigned, the scale was turned, and victory declared itself for the confederated tribes.

It was a sore battle, which cost the destruction of 25,000 of the Benjamite army, together with the slaughter of all the men in their cities, a small remnant only (consisting of 600 warriors) escaping to the rock Rimmon. The conquerors retired, not to triumph, but to weep. They "came to the house of God, and abode there till even, before God, and lifted up their voices and wept sore; and said, Oh Lord God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel?" On the morrow---according to the statement which has already come under our notice they "rose early, and built there an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings." So numerous were their sacrifices that, as on a later occasion, "the brazen altar was not able to receive them*." 2 Chron. Vii. 7.* We find not, however, that any answer was given to their inquiry, or that any advice was granted them in their new difficulty. But there was a reason for the silence of the oracle. A rash oath had been taken,---an oath to allow no intermarriage with the guilty tribe; and when the people had brought themselves into a dilemma by their own imprudence, they were left to taste the fruits of their folly. Had they repented of their hasty determination, had they avowed their indiscretion, had they persevered in their effort to gain heavenly teaching, had they sought release from a vow which was to their neighbor's hurt, they might have been accepted and blessed, they might have been absolved from their bond, or told how to avert its evil consequences. But unwilling to avow their precipitancy, and turning away from the door of the tabernacle, confident in their own understanding, they were left to their own devices, and succeeded in extricating themselves only by an

unjustifiable evasion of the oath by which they were bound.

In conclusion: we learn, from a review of the whole, that many a perplexity is traceable to our own short-sightedness and want of self-control;---that in every perplexity, whether of our own causing, or whether produced by extraneous influences, an honorable way of escape is to be discovered only by following the light which beams from heaven;---and that if such light be not visible, we must entreat its bestowal. This we must entreat perseveringly, not discouraged by the partial failures of the past, not damped by the uncertainties of the future. We must also entreat it submissively, watching against that self-deception whereby we so often resign a fancied good, with the latent notion of having it rendered back to our fond embrace. Above all, we must mingle penitence with our every petition; for it is only as we say from the heart, "God be merciful to me a sinner," that we can expect, through the Savior's merits, to obtain an answer of peace. But thus coming, devoid of all self-confidence, either as it regards our own wisdom to direct our steps, or our own righteousness to deserve direction from above,---thus committing our ways to the Lord, and asking Him to undertake for us, we shall not be left to the dull glimmerings of unassisted reason. He who said to his disciples, "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you," immediately added, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things." The promise applies, indeed, to spiritual guidance; but will not He who gives the greater, also freely give the less?

" What though no answering voice is heard,

His oracles, the written word,

Counsel and guidance still impart,

Responsive to the upright heart.

No need of prophets to inquire;

The sun is risen j the stars retire.

The Comforter is come, and sheds

His holy unction on our heads.

Lord! with this grace our hearts inspire,
Answer our sacrifice by fire;
And by thy mighty acts declare
Thou art the God that hearest prayer."

Chapter 11 - The Ark at Shiloh; or, God's Presence Revealed to the Young

THE ARK AT SHILOH;

(Continued;)

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE REVEALED TO THE YOUNG.

DURING the latter period of the ark's residence at Shiloh, the oracle had become mute. "There was no open vision." The wickedness of the priests had provoked the Lord to hide his face. A denunciatory message had been sent by the lips of a prophet, to warn Eli of the judgments that were in store for his rebellious family. But from the mercy-seat, no communications had been made; from Him who dwelt between the cherubim, had no distinct utterance been heard. There was none in the sacerdotal family who might be honored as the recipient and transmitter of such a revelation, Hophni and Phinehas had forfeited the blessing by their crimes; and the high priest himself had so allowed his paternal affections to gain the ascendency over the claims of his official duty, that not for him would the Urim and Thummim give forth their mysterious response.

Such was the state of things, while "the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli." *1 Sam. Iii. 1-18.* A needful ministry was that, for the priest's aged eyes "began to wax dim, that he could not see." One night he lay down to rest as usual on his accustomed couch, which was in or near the tabernacle court, his young servitor also sleeping close at hand. During the watches of the night, while yet "the lamp of God" was burning "in the temple," or sacred tent, where at that period "the ark of God" still abode, the youthful sleeper was aroused by a voice as of one speaking to him, and calling him by name. *Comp. Num. vii. 89.* Conscious that but one human voice was likely to summon him at such an hour---as well as conscious that but one human voice was so nigh---he gave the cheerful response, "Here am I," and hastened to his

master's side. Surprised to receive no intimation of Eli's wish, he repeated, "Here am I, for thou calledst me." The priest, imagining the child to have been under the influence of some disturbing dream, sent him back to his repose. Then was the voice heard a second time, exclaiming, "Samuel!" Indolence was not permitted to whisper that this was again a delusion; self-indulgence was not allowed to plead for a delay, in order to test whether the call would be repeated. Again, and unrepiningly, "Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I, for thou didst call me." Once more was the fact denied by his astonished guardian, and the child dismissed to his resting place. And although there was no "mother's hand to smooth his bed, when slumber's dewy cloud fell round him, and darkness as a veil had wound him," yet no fear possessed his heart; for that absent mother had doubtless in her yearly visits oft spoken to him of One who "will keep the feet of his saints," *1 Sam. ii. 9.* One to whose service he was dedicated, One who had power to shield him. But while unalarmed, and while confiding, perhaps, in Jehovah's protective presence, no suspicion for a moment flashed across his mind that he had heard the voice of Deity: he "did not yet know the Lord,"---that is, he was not yet acquainted with God's mode of making known His will either to priest or prophet. The time was come, however, when he was to learn it. A third call was heard, and a third attempt made to satisfy the demand: "he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I, for thou didst call me." The reiteration of the call proved to Eli, that it had issued from the Divine presence; he "perceived that the Lord had called the child." In accordance with this conviction, he instructed the youthful prophet how to act, and sent him to await a renewed summons. Then" the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times." There was now in the child a preparedness. of heart; the voice approached nearer; the call was emphatically doubled, "Samuel! Samuel!" The answer was ready, "Speak, for thy servant heareth." This was no mere phrase that passed the lips. We think it is no straining of the narrative to trace here an intended deviation from the formula prescribed for him. He omitted the name" Jehovah," as though scarcely deeming it possible that one so young should be indeed thus honored, and as though trembling to take so sacred a name upon lips so unworthy. It was the hesitation of modesty, and not of unbelief. His faith evinced itself in the words he did speak; his humility, in the absence of the word which he omitted. The Divine communication that had been so won- drously prefaced, was one which filled

him with dismay. He "feared to show Eli the vision;" and it was not till solemnly entreated, that he announced the irrevocable prediction. This early initiation into the prophetic office was the commencement of a long and honorable course. "The Lord appeared again in Shiloh;" He returned to His dwelling place on earth; He "revealed himself to Samuel," and "did let none of his words fall to the ground."

The history is rich in practical instruction. So often, however, has it been brought forward, that it might seem superfluous to advance it anew, were it not of such exceeding importance. The same God who called Samuel still speaks to the young. He does not call them by name, but He speaks to their conscience. He calls them not to be prophets, but He invites them to become disciples of Christ, that they may be priests and kings unto God. He calls them, not in an audible voice, but through the instrumentality of parents, ministers, teachers, friends. Often do they fall into Samuel's error. They mistake the heavenly for an earthly voice. They "do not yet know the Lord." They have not recognized His authoritative message. They have not wondered at His condescension. They have not bowed in homage before His words. They have not learned to say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." This is the first great turning point. Till the ear of the soul is gained, its emotions cannot be reached. Those who are enwrapped in the dreams of earth, those who prefer the ease of slumbering on amid their sinful indulgences, those who resist the heavenly call, who turn away the shoulder, who refuse to hearken, are forfeiting privileges and honors such as earth is unable to confer. It is true, that the first message will oft-times be one of mourning, and lamentation, and woe. It will tell of sins committed, and of judgment incurred. But such is not the only revelation God has to make. Let that be humbly and tremblingly received, and other messages will follow---messages of grace, and goodness, and mercy, and love. Jehovah will reveal Himself to the youthful heart, and will grant the constant communications of His favor.

It is impossible to determine how soon in the tender years of infancy, the Most High can thus make a child the partaker of His grace. The very uncertainty should make us anxious that the earliest ideas should be those of reverence, and make us pray that the soul may be in an attitude to respond to God's earliest call with an intelligent "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

Happy all who have learned to adopt these words as their own! Happiest those who have learned the lesson soonest! Wondrous is the goodness which "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings has perfected praise." Not for their innocence does God deign to accept their infant homage. The voice that spoke to the docile, active, obedient, unselfish child in the tabernacle precincts at Shiloh, was a voice that spoke from off the mercy-seat. And the loving Savior, who holds the lambs in His arms and carries them in his bosom, is He who died for them on Calvary. The seeds of evil are within, though they have scarcely germinated; the tendencies to sin are perceptible, though they are but partially developed. Sovereign, therefore, inscrutably sovereign is the grace which reveals to babes what is hid from the wise and prudent. Merciful, unspeakably merciful is that Divine condescension which has gathered so many young ones into the earthly fold, before they have learned to stray far among the dangerous thickets,---which has taught them to love and value His training, by granting them the experience of its tenderness.

Rejoice, youthful believer, in your privilege! A child you may be in years; but yet, through Christ Jesus, a child of God. He who did not despise the children's hosannas in the temple, accepts your praises. He who took children in His arms and blessed them, is your Savior and your Friend. You are growing in years, but the Lord is with you. Life is before you, but you have a guide. Death is before you, but Jesus will not forsake you. Eternity is before you, but heaven is to be your home. Take care, then, to "let no man despise" your youth; and, to guard against this, strive by the Holy Spirit's help to be "an example of the believers in word; in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." There are some who think early piety *will work pride.* Let your temper prove the contrary. Samuel went not about boasting of his honor; and you, if you remember God, will feel your own sinfulness, your own feebleness, your own unworthiness. You must be ready to give an answer of the hope that is in you. When you are asked whether you love Jesus, and why you love Him, you must be as true, and faithful, and open, in telling it, as Samuel was in repeating what God had spoken to him. But so long as you are young like Samuel, you must generally wait to be asked about these things. To companions of your own age, you may talk about Christ, and what He has done for *you.,* and what He is ready to do for *them;* but, in company with

your elders, you must let your disposition and your conduct, rather than your words, prove that you have been with Jesus. Again, there are other people who fancy that early piety *unfits for the duties of life.* Give heed that you do not let this be laid to *your* charge. Samuel did not lie dreaming over the wonders of that memorable night. He did not rise, with the notion that his former employments were beneath his notice. He "lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord," as he had been accustomed in times past. Just so, when God calls us to be His, and we have obeyed that call, and have given ourselves to His service, we must remember that we can best serve Him by diligently fulfilling each common duty of our everyday life---fulfilling it the more cheerfully, the more attentively, the more carefully, because for His sake. Whenever God calls you to listen to His word, say again, as you have already said, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Whenever· He calls you to your earthly duties, say, "Here am I," and hasten to perform them with an immediate and a hearty obedience.

Chapter 12 - The Ark in the Battlefield; or, God's Presence Forgotten

THE ARK IN THE BATTLEFIELD;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE FORGOTTEN.

THE last year of Eli's life was disturbed by the renewal of warfare. The Philistines had again begun to vex Israel, and it had become needful that active measures should be taken to stay their inroads. The Hebrew army went out to meet them, and pitched their tents in a place which, in after times, obtained the name of "Ebenezer." The Philistines, who were encamped at Aphek, "put themselves in array" against the opposing force, and gained a decided victory. *1 Sam. iv.* There was little cause for the elders of Israel to ask, "Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines?" Had they allowed conscience to utter its testimony, it would have said, "Have ye not procured this unto yourselves, in that ye have forsaken the Lord your God?" Without instituting any thorough, earnest inquiry, as to the true cause of their discomfiture, they set themselves to frame an expedient for the re-establishment of their martial fame. "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies." In taking this step they were guilty of two evils:---first, of presumption, in removing the ark without authority from the place where God had set his name; and secondly, of superstition, in regarding the ark as though it were a miraculous ensign, and had a kind of magical power, thus making it

"Their talisman, their charm, their boasted pledge

of safety and success,"

It is manifest that they associated with it no confidence in the power of Him whose presence it tokened. Their expectation was that*"it"* would rescue them, and that it would, therefore, accomplish for them that which, in its absence,

God had shown himself unwilling to effect. They mistook the symbol for the thing symbolized. The misjudged scheme was, nevertheless, generally approved; and "the people sent to Shiloh," not to consult the prophet, but to execute that which they had devised, and to "bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of Hosts, which dwelt between the cherubims." Eli thought the measure ill advised; and when the feeble remonstrances which he doubtless made, were overruled, he still distrusted the working of it; "his heart trembled for the ark of God." Hophni and Phinehas, probably glad to have such an excuse for participating in the excitements of a martial life, whose eventful stir better suited their minds than the quiet and sacred occupations of their calm retreat at Shiloh, fulfilled their duty as guardians of the ark, and repaired to the scene of action. The looked-for arrival awoke exceeding joy: "all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again." The attention of the Philistines was attracted, and the tidings filled them with sore alarm. The comments which they made, on being informed of what the Israelites had done, betray the confused notions that prevailed in their midst. "God is come into the camp," said they, as though His presence were limited to the dimensions of that narrow chest. "Who shall deliver us out of the hands of these mighty gods?" as though the Israelites, like other nations, adored a plurality of divine beings. "These are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues," as though the ark had existed in the days of the Hebrew thraldom. "The gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness," as though Pharaoh and his host had followed the people in their wanderings from station to station. We cannot wonder at these errors on the part of untaught heathens, when we see what groveling ideas were entertained by such as had among them a revelation of God's will. The descendants of Abraham well knew, that God had wrought mighty deeds for their ancestors, long ere the ark had been fashioned; and they might have recollected that their fathers, with that ark in sight, had been warned of the curse which Jehovah's power could inflict on such as turned away from His service and His fear. Strong, however, in their vain confidence, they renewed the combat; but only to experience a new calamity. "Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent," while the slaughter was more than seven times as great as in the preceding engagement. Nor was this all. Hophni and Phinehas were slain; and, worse still, "the ark of God was taken." The" Chaldee Paraphrast" records a tradition, that Goliath himself was the warrior

who gained this trophy; which, if a mere fable, yet demonstrates the unwillingness of the Jewish commentators to believe that the greatest of Israel's national treasures had been yielded to a less valiant captor,

The mournful state of the desolated Shiloh may be better imagined than described; The messenger, with his clothes rent and earth upon his head---the wailing of the inhabitants---the intense emotion which proved fatal to the anxious, watching Eli---the dying words of his son's wife, as she named her new-born son "Ichabod," saying, "The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken," are the successive hints which portray in outline a deep and wide-spread grief. Truly, the glory had departed, departed as an evidence of the Divine displeasure. It was because "God was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel," that he "delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand; he gave His people over also unto the sword, and was wroth with His inheritance: the fire," a fitting emblem of destructive war, "consumed their young men," and, therefore, "their maidens were not given in marriage: their priests fell by the sword, and their widows," unable to survive the sad intelligence, or forgetful of their personal bereavement in the greater public loss, "made no lamentation." *Ps. Lxxviii. 59-64.* The chastisement fully answered to the crime. It was suitable; for the very object in which the people had placed a false trust, was that of which they deplored the loss. And it was likely to be profitable; for it was calculated to teach them, that the ark was of value, not for its own sake, but for the sake of Him to whose earthly residence it testified.

The error of Israel is one to which the human heart is ever prone. Nothing is easier than to lose sight of God in those very means of grace whereby He has in time past manifested Himself to our souls. Aptness to walk by sight rather than by faith, to be swayed more by the external and showy than by what is inward and unostentatious, tends to make us value the material above the spiritual. We think more of the form, than of the substance; more of the sign, than of the thing signified; more of the golden conduit, than of the pure water which it conveys. In such a state of mind, we think more of Zion, than of Zion's God; more of the preaching itself, than of the truth preached; we look upon the rite of baptism, either as a passport to heaven, or else simply as a rite which betokens admission into the ranks of discipleship, while oblivious of the important doctrine it is designed to shadow forth; we partake of the

sacramental elements, and fail to "discern the Lord's body." But when we thus withdraw our confidence from the Most High, to repose it in observances, and institutions, and creeds, and sanctuaries, then does He write a sentence of death upon them all.

It has been well said, "that our best maxims, our dearest heir-looms, are worthless and dead, if they do not bear witness of the living God;" and that He "pours contempt upon the best devices, upon those which bear most the stamp of His own wisdom, when they exalt themselves against Him." Hence the secret of so many golden candlesticks removed---so many burning and shining lights extinguished---so many Sabbaths mourned as profitless so many ordinances found unrefreshing---so many lamentations poured out over the hiding of Jehovah's face. What was said of the Jewish church in reference to earthly blessings, may often be said of us in respect of our spiritual privileges: "She did not know," (or consider,)" that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold;" and often, therefore, is it needful that a correction overtake us, similar to that which was threatened against her;---"therefore will I return, and take away my corn, and my wine, and my wool, and my flax." The Lord is "a jealous God," and "will not give His glory to another." Let it not be ours to provoke His departure. Let us never be content to enter the banqueting house, unless His banner over us be love. Let us not dream, that we can be satisfied with "the garden of lilies" and the "bed of spices," unless our "beloved" is there. As it had been better, far better, for Israel to have had Jehovah's presence without the ark, than the ark without the favor of their God, even so it would be infinitely better for us to be excluded from sanctuary services, and enjoy communion with God in private, than to go with the multitude that keep holy day, and yet be deprived of a sanctuary blessing. "The means of grace," as old divines used to say, "are not so precious, as grace by the means." While, therefore, we guard against underrating them on the one hand, let us he equally on our guard lest, on the other hand, we overvalue them. Let us learn to estimate them at their true worth; precious, as God's appointments; precious, as the earthen vessels through which the living water is outpoured; but valueless, apart from His presence, and unreplenished by the streams of His grace.

"In vain is every outward rite,

Unless Almighty grace be given;

Naught save the Spirit's life and light
Can fit a sinner's soul for heaven."

Chapter 13 - The Ark in Captivity; or, God's Presence Unwelcome to the Sinner

THE ARK IN CAPTIVITY;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE UNWELCOME

TO THE SINNER.

ALTHOUGH, for wise designs, God , had allowed the ark to be captured, and even taken into an enemy's land, He watched over it, that it should not be destroyed. Its absence from Canaan would eventually be a dispensation of mercy to His people in freeing their hearts from the blind superstition with which they had regarded it; its sojourn in Philistia was to be marked by a series of judgments on the heathen who knew not God. It was first carried to Ashdod, or Azotus, and placed as an offering in the temple of Dagon, chief of the Philistine deities. *1 Sam. v. and vi. 1-18.* But" when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow," an amazing spectacle greeted their astonished sight: "behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord." They had placed the foreign shrine in their temple to do homage to their god; and, lo! their god was prostrate before it in the attitude of adoration or subjection. Willing to believe, or to pretend, that this had been an accidental occurrence, "they took Dagon, and set him in his place again." Another morning they entered the temple, half-fearing, half-hoping, and eagerly wondering what would be the result; when, "behold, Dagon was fallen" as before "upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord; "---yet not as before, for "the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands, were cut off"---the seat of intelligence, and the instruments of power;---an emblematic proclamation of the truth, that false gods "are altogether brutish and foolish," while the Lord Jehovah is He who "hath made the earth by His power, and established the world by His wisdom." A piteous spectacle did the fallen idol present,

"When the captive ark

Maim'd his brute image, head and hands lopp'd off

In his own temple, on the grunsell-edge

Where he fell flat, and shamed his worshippers.

Dagon his name, sea-monster, upward man

And downward fish."

When, therefore, it is stated that "only the stump of Dagon was left to him," we perceive that he was shorn, not only of his supposed divinity, but likewise of the small resemblance he bore to something like humanity. Terror might well strike the heart of his priests and worshippers: but, alas! conviction reached them not. From that day forth, they forbore, on entering their temple, to tread upon the threshold; but they refrained not from their accustomed worship. They only added a new superstition to their old idolatry; a superstition, which was long continued, and which though they meant it not---served in reality to perpetuate the remembrance, and to furnish an evidence, of Dagon's overthrow.

The persistence of the people in idolatry, after such manifest proofs of Jehovah's power, called down upon them His avenging rod. Diseases of two diverse kinds, painful and pestilential, were sent forth; and "the hand of the Lord was heavy upon them of Ashdod." Yet for all this they repented not. "Dagon, our god," were the words that still fell from their lips. They rightly traced their affliction to the God of Israel; "His hand is sore upon us." But they were unwise in the resolution they formed; "the ark shall not abide with us." Better were it to have said, "We will put away our idols, we will serve Jehovah, we will seek to retain His presence, and if possible to enjoy His favor." "The ark of the God of Israel," they call it;---not a god itself, as they had once esteemed it. They had learned something, by having it in their possession. They had found that it bore no idol form, that it contained no graven image. A simple, though a costly chest, they no longer thought it an embodiment or representation of Deity. If they had looked within, which we can scarcely doubt, the most they could have seen would be two written tables, a vase containing an omer of some mysterious food, and a singular almond branch; but nothing that indicated a divinity. The attitude of devotion, which marked the cherubic figures, precluded the idea that these were objects

of worship. The sacred coffer, though one for which the God of the Hebrews had shown himself jealous, was manifestly in itself nothing more than a coffer, connected in some way with the religious belief or religious practices of Israel. Whatever it might be, it was to be dismissed from Ashdod. But what to do with it, now became the question. Blindly supposing that Ashdod might, for some cause, be a residence peculiarly obnoxious, the lords of the Philistines voted for its transference to one of their other cities. The experiment was tried in reference to Gath; but on the Gittites were similar judgments inflicted. Again God "smote his enemies, and put them to a perpetual reproach." *Ps. Lxxviii. 65, 66.* From Gath the ark was removed to Ekron; and here the cry resounded, "They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people." Reluctantly did they receive the unwelcome visitant; and eagerly did they entreat its removal, when upon them also came the same afflictive dispensations. Gaza and Askelon appear to have shared a like fate; and thus for "seven months" were the fenced cities, with their neighboring country villages, successively made the depositories of the mysterious and fatal prize. But the further it was carried, the more widely was God's power manifested; and the more He was resisted, the more grievous were the outpourings of His wrath.

At length a council of the priests and diviners was convened, who reproached the lords of the Philistines with hardening their hearts, and advised them without delay to make suitable preparations for the restoring of the ark to its rightful abode. Instead of receiving a ransom, they were to pay one. A conciliatory present was to be sent, consisting of golden emblems in commemoration of the means used for their punishment. *[It is considered probable, that mice had been allowed to overrun the land; that hence a famine had been induced, and that this had occasioned the deadly pestilence, Thus the images of the remote cause were made to stand for symbols of the effect.]* These were to be in sets of five, to correspond with the number of the Philistine lords, and were to be deposited in a coffer by the side of the ark. Ignorant of the mode prescribed for its conveyance, a new cart was provided, to be drawn by two milch kine, on which had come no yoke, according to the universally prevalent idea an idea, neither untruthful nor unsuggestive---that to God's service should be brought that "which had not been already used, and in part worn out, in the service of the world, but which was thus wholly,

and from the first, consecrated to heaven."--*[Trench's Hulsean Lectures, 3rd edit., p. 219]* The cattle were to be left unguided, that they might choose their own path: if they went Canaanward, it was to be considered an indication, that thither they must convey their burden: if they took an. opposite route, it would be concluded that the recent calamities had not been sustained for the ark's sake, and that they might yet retain it as a memento of their signal triumph over the Hebrews. Thus, to the very close, were they loath to own Jehovah's power; thus were they perseveringly anxious to lay hold on every pretext which could make them think it was only "a chance that happened" to them. And when they had followed it, and witnessed its joyous reception, "they returned to Ekron the same day," idolaters still, despite the means of enlightenment which had been afforded to them.

We might enlarge here on the presence of God among the heathen, and note how there are seasons when He causes the light of truth to arise upon the nations who have long sat in darkness; how this always results in a demonstration of His superiority,---the idols of every land, like those of Egypt, and like Dagon himself, being "moved at His presence;" and how, in many cases, a persistent refusal to cast away the vain objects of their fathers' worship has been followed by judgments on the idolaters, many a race having been exterminated, and many more brought into subjection under a foreign dominion, to the intent that all the nations of the earth might learn to "give glory to the God of Israel."

But it is more important to remember, that we have heathens at home; and to them this subject will equally apply. For more than "seven months" has God been contending with some of these. Yet are they idolaters still. Perhaps, reader, you are among their number. Perhaps self, or your kindred---perhaps worldly pleasure---or, it may be, worldly wealth---or worldly fame---is your idol. Has it never been overthrown? have you never been compelled to see it prostrate in the dust? You may have set it again in its place. Have you never seen it once more laid low? have you never seen it crippled? have you never seen it held up to execration? have you never had a glimpse of its deformity? You may have shuddered for the moment. You may have retained a constant impression of the disastrous event. But have you not hardened yourself against conviction? have you not clung to your idol still? You may have been brought into affliction. Did you not imagine that some outward change would

suffice to turn away the cloud of wrath? The hand of God may have continued to be heavy upon you. Did you not try to persuade yourself that it was "a chance"? You may at last have been brought to tremble at His presence: have you ventured to deem that presence unwelcome? have you wished to put it from you? have you dared to say, "The ark shall not abide with us? " Oh! pause and bethink you what this means, what it includes, and what it will involve. If, like the Gadarenes, you beseech the Lord Jesus to withdraw, He may take you at your word, and refuse to exercise toward you His healing power. If now you say, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways," He will hereafter say to you, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Remember that there is a "Woe" against all those who strive with their Maker. There can be no doubt as to the issue of the contest. He will be, He must be the victor; but is it not better that He should be glorified *by* you than *upon* you? is it not better that you should yield Him a willing service, than that you should be crushed beneath the rod of His power? Is it not better that you should learn to rejoice in His presence than to dread it? Rise, then, and betake yourself to His footstool; own His power; seek His mercy through Christ; ask for the gift of His spirit to make you what He would have you to be; confess that other lords have had dominion over you, but resolve that henceforth you will make mention only of His name; and adopt as your own those unequivocal words of self surrender,

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate' er that idol be---
Help me to tear it from thy throne,
And worship only thee."

Chapter 14 - The Ark at Bethshemesh; or, God's Presence Contemned

THE ARK AT BETHSHEMESH;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE CONTEMNED.

THE experiment, made by the lords of the Philistines resulted in no doubtful issue. The kine, though unaccustomed to the yoke, took as "straight" a course, as if broken in to obey the rein; they "turned not aside to the right hand or to the left," but" went along the highway" as steadily as if the green fields on either side had no attraction, and pursued "the way of Bethshemesh," although their "lowing as they went" proclaimed that the calves which had been left behind were unforgotten. Instinct was strong, but an overruling Providence was yet stronger. Onward they trod the unknown path, and rested not till they reached "the field of Joshua the Bethshemite." *1Sam. vi. 12-21.* The gathering in of the wheat harvest had drawn together a large supply of reapers into the valley, who, lifting up their eyes, beheld the approaching cart. Attracted, probably, by the unusual spectacle of a vehicle thus drawn at will by animals that were not recognized as having grazed in their fields, or passed along their road, and the still more wondrous sight of a stranger-group following it,---men of a foreign nation and of distinguished aspect,---they looked yet more closely, and sought to learn what it might portend. Another glance revealed the truth. They saw the ark itself, their long-lost treasure, returning to its original possessors. Whether, as we incline to think, it had still remained covered with its veil of bluish purple, and was hence known to them as having been borne in their midst to the battle-field of Ebenezer; or, whether its covering had been lost, and it was looked on by them as no Hebrew eye, save that of the priests, had beheld it, since the artificers of Sinai had made an end of fashioning it, we cannot with certainty decide. But when they saw it, and, either from memory or from description, perceived what it was, we are not surprised to learn that "they rejoiced." The glory which had departed was restored; the God that had forsaken their land was now favorable to His inheritance. The Levites, numerous in that locality, for

Bethshemesh was a sacerdotal city, assigned to the priestly branch of the family of Kohath, *Josh. xxi. 10-15.* came forward, took down the ark and coffer, and laid them upon a great stone, which was close at hand. Then they "clave the wood of the cart" as fuel for the sacrificial fire, and offered the kine for a burnt offering, that neither the one nor the other might be afterwards employed in a less hallowed service. The peculiarity of the occasion might justify the substitution of kine in the place of bullocks, especially as more regular sacrifices were subsequently presented: "The men of Bethshemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto the Lord." Not, indeed, in Bethshemesh, strictly speaking, ought such oblations to have been made. This was not the appointed place; no tabernacle was here; no superior priest; no brazen altar; but there was here that symbol of the Divine presence for which the tabernacle was but a curtained palace,---that on which the high priest himself was but an attendant,---that which was needful to sanctify both the altar and the gift. These truths rightly apprehended by the Bethshemites, there had been little to blame in this their act. It would have been a departure from the outward form, to express the more promptly and heartily those inward feelings which the external rites were designed to excite. It would have been a recognition of the great principles on which the minor precept was based. It would have been relinquishing the letter of the law, to drink more deeply into its spirit.

But we are not clear, that our charity may in the present instance accord so much. We fear there was more of selfishness, than of spirituality, in the course they took. Puffed up with the honor of having the ark in their midst, it seems that they dreamed of retaining it. We read not that they took counsel to send it on to Shiloh, or to whatever place the tabernacle then occupied. The very act of their sacrificing for themselves would appear to have been prompted, not so much by pious joy at having once more the opportunity of engaging in a long suspended privilege, as by the elation of heart which led them to imagine their own city might for the future be made the center of Israel's national worship.

This supposition easily explains their subsequent conduct. How long the ark abode among them, is not positively stated; but as we are not informed of its having been even temporarily lodged in any of their dwellings, it would seem probable that their transgression almost immediately followed on their act of

worship. Priding themselves on the distinction made in their favor by the staying of the cart, when it might have passed them by and gone further on towards its former sanctuary, they entertained self-complacent notions of their own worthiness. Informed probably of the mischiefs the ark had wrought among the heathen, they plumed themselves on their superiority as belonging to God's chosen people---a people among whom He had dwelt for so many hundred years, and to whose midst He had proved himself so anxious to return. Hence, when curiosity arose in reference to a chest which they had never before approached, they were prepared to listen to the tempter's voice. Secure in a fancied immunity, buoyed up with an idea of their special acceptableness to God, and fancying that the arrival of the ark among them had invested them with new privileges, they rashly drew near to the sacred symbol; they put forth the hand of disobedience to lift the interposing cover,*[There seems to us a little uncertainty as to the right interpretation of this act, literally considered, however clear may be the moral animus which characterized it. The question arises, whether the covering which the Bethshemites must have lifted, was the veil or the lid. The lifting of the former would enable them to look upon the ark; of the latter, to look into it. Our version conveys the second idea, but the Hebrew is susceptible of being rendered, "they looked on the ark," This, indeed, would seem, on consideration, to have been a sufficient pitch of daringness. It is difficult to think they could so easily be emboldened to look within, when a mere touch was stringently forbidden and condignly punished; unless, indeed, they were urged on by the vain pretext of examining whether its contents had returned from Philistia, undestroyed and unimpaired. It is more easy to understand how they could venture gently to raise the pall, that they might satisfy the ardent desire which longed to gaze on the glorious cherub-forms beneath.]* and irrev- verently gazed on that which was to them prohibited. But the gratification was soon over. The triumphing of the wicked was short. They had despised the presence of Him who dwelt between the cherubim; and from that presence came forth a swift destruction.

"The insulted ark,

Jealous for God, flashed death on eyes profane,"

The Lord smote the men of Bethshemesh, even "fifty thousand and threescore and ten"---or, as perhaps it ought to be read, "fifty out of a thousand, even

threescore and ten." The instant destruction of one twentieth of the population might well be lamented as "a great slaughter." But their chastisement wrought not a true repentance. Instead of acknowledging their guilt, they proudly asked, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?" Instead of urging His stay, they discontentedly enquired, "To whom shall He go up from us?" Kirjath-jearim was the next important town to the north-westward in the direction of Shiloh; and thither the men of Bethshemesh "sent messengers, saying, The Philistines have brought again the ark of the Lord, come ye down, and fetch it up to you,"---concealing the true motive which actuated the offer, and proving as selfishly anxious to part with the ark, as erst they had been to keep it.

The error into which they fell was not one peculiar to their day. Even with us, what is at first mere idle curiosity, will, if unchecked, lead on to that which is impious and irreverent. There are still "secret things" that "belong to the Lord our God." There is much that is inscrutable in His ways, and much that is incomprehensible in His nature. His revealed word is no unintelligible document, but the subjects of which it treats are deeper than human intellects can fathom. There is a veil drawn between us and the Infinite One,---a veil which hinders not our communion with Him, but which we may not dare to lift. He permits us to draw near and worship before Him; but He allows no slighting of His presence, no careless waiting on His ordinances, no trifling with holy things, no intruding into those things which we have not seen, vainly puffed up with a fleshly mind.

The human heart is proverbially addicted to extremes. The Israelites had lately erred in thinking too much of the ark; now they sinned in thinking too little of it. Anon they had viewed it with superstitious reverence; now they regarded it with unhallowed familiarity. Nor is it less so with ourselves. At one time, we almost deify our religious privileges; and then we ere long forget the sacredness which pertains to them. At one time, we are ready to ascribe actual inherent sanctity to material objects; and presently we are found overlooking the associations of sanctity with which they are wisely invested. Nothing is more common than to exchange the most groveling superstition for the most daring recklessness. If it is needful at times to be reminded that the tabernacles of the Lord of hosts are amiable only as we see His power and His glory in the sanctuary, it is as needful to listen to the

cautionary words, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God." In the divine presence even angels veil their faces; and feeble, sinful man has far more reason to tread God's earthly courts with a reverential footstep and an adoring heart. Solemnity is in no way opposed to a holy joy. That excitement of feeling in which God's greatness and holiness are comparatively lost sight of, is a false flame. That rapturous delight which arises from contemplating God's goodness apart from His glory, and His love apart from His condescension, is no healthful sentiment. A well-founded scriptural joy is such as fills the redeemed above, who stand before the throne, but cast their crowns at the Savior's feet. It is not allowed us to suppose, that solemnity in worship is a duty which has passed away with the things of Judaism. "Receiving a kingdom, which cannot be moved," says the Apostle, "let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire." It is true that we are privileged to sing,

"Jesus! where'er thy people meet,

There they behold thy mercy-seat;

Where' er they seek Thee, thou art found,

And every place is hallowed ground:"

But we must not let this valuable thought be abused. We must remember, that to make no "difference between the holy and the profane" is not the way to improve our spirituality; and that to treat the sanctuary as though it were an ordinary building, is not the best preparation for looking upon every spot as consecrated by God's presence. We may come "into His presence with singing," but we must also "worship Him in the beauty of holiness." We may "enter into His gates with thanksgiving," but we must not fail to "praise His great and terrible name, for it is holy." We must "exalt the Lord our God," when we "worship at His footstool." We have already seen that familiarity with divine things is no excuse for indifference; we here learn that it affords no ground for presumption. The brightness of the light which beams on us from heaven may not make us forget that, could we have borne it, the radiance had been more effulgent. Our nearness to the throne must not make us forget that it *is* a throne. Our access to God must not tempt us to forget that He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Real communion with Him will not entail this evil. It is when we call ourselves Christ's without being partakers

of His Spirit, it is when we view mercies from God's hand as sure indexes of His favor, it is when we are entrenched in self-esteem and vain confidence, that we are in danger of falling under the same condemnation as the heedless Bethshemites, and so learning to our cost that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Chapter 15 - The Ark at Kirjath-Jearim; or, God's Presence Withdrawn

THE ARK AT KIRJATH-JEARIM;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE WITHDRAWN.

THE men of Kirjath-jearim were not unwilling to accept the overture made by their neighbors at Bethshemesh. They "came and fetched up the ark of the Lord, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord." *1 Sam. vii. 1,2.* Theirs was no city of Levites, and yet their service was accepted. There are two things very noticeable here. We trace a distinction between what providence orders, and what it permits---between what it directly sanctions, and what it designedly allows---between what it brings about, and what it overrules. The ark, under divine direction, is brought into the midst of Kohathites, that there may be no excuse for a breach of the divine law: the ark, under human control, is carried to a city of Judah, and there, for wise purposes, God suffers it to remain; but it is there as a stranger in a strange place, bereft of its rightful attendants and wonted ceremonies. We see also in this, the real superiority of the moral over the ritual. The men of Bethshemesh were of the tribe set apart to minister before the Lord; but their official sanctity could not compensate for their unholy presumption. The men of Kirjath-jearim were of Judah's tribe; yet their willing mind and their earnest piety were accepted in lieu of the ceremonial obedience they could not render, and the tabernacle services they were unable to perform. Not with thoughtless levity, but with reverential care, they gave reception to the valued shrine. Having no tabernacle wherein to bestow it, they concealed it from view, and screened it from harm, beneath the shelter of a private dwelling, whose elevated site would nevertheless make the honored spot a visible center, toward which their eyes could safely turn in penitence and prayer. In absence of the priest and the altar, they might immolate no sacrifices; but they set apart one of their number to observe the purifications and abstinences enjoined on the sons of Aaron, that, if possible,

he might be temporarily accepted as its sacred guardian.

For the apparent want of any effort on their part to send the ark forward, and locate it in the tabernacle, we cannot account; though we have no warrant to charge them with any undue assumption. The lack of effort in their countrymen to see it restored to its ancient abode arose from the apathy and heartlessness which at that time pervaded the nation;---"it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long,"---the time, namely, before the people began to think of it; "for it was twenty years." Then, but, as it would seem, not till then, "all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." The fact that Samuel did not interfere to counsel its restitution is unexplained; but we may well believe that it was either because he received no prophetic impulse to that effect, or else because some heavenly mandate constrained his silence. If it is asked why Jehovah interposed not to ordain its restoration, one answer is obvious. It was because He "forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men; moreover He refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim, but chose the tribe of Judah, the Mount Zion which He loved." *Ps. Lxxviii.60, 67, 68.* Such was His divine purpose, and here we see the first step towards its accomplishment. The prolonged severance of the ark from the tabernacle was to prepare the way for the abrogation of the one and the worthier re-establishment of the other.

The continuance of the ark at Kirjath-baal seems to have been altogether of seventy or eighty years' duration. *Comp. 1 Sam. vii. 2, 16; Acts xiii. 21; 2Sam. v. 5; and vi. 2.* There are some, indeed, who conclude that at the expiration of the first twenty years the re-awakened feeling of national piety led to the bringing back of the ark, not indeed to Shiloh, but to the tabernacle which had been pitched elsewhere;---that, during Saul's reign, they were carried about from place to place; and that this renewed wandering of the two conjoined explains the offering of sacrifices, or casting of lots, or presenting of showbread, or laying up of documents "before the Lord" in Mizpeh, Nob, and Gilgal. *1 Sam. vii. 6; x. 17, 19, 25; xiii. 8, 9, 12; xv. 31; xxi. 6, 7.* There are, however, many objections to this idea. We have already hinted [Section X., (on Judg. xx. 1.)] that the expression "before the Lord" does not necessarily imply the presence of the ark. The offering of sacrifice, moreover, is known to have taken place during this disordered state of Israel's affairs, elsewhere than at the brazen altar, as for example, when the family sacrifice

at Bethlehem was held by David's brethren. *1 Sam. xx. 24-29.* The oracular responses might, in like manner, be vouchsafed wherever the priest and his ephod were found, as at Keilah and Ziklag. *1 Sam. xxiii. 9-12, and xxx. 6-8.* The offering of show-bread may have been kept up as a regular weekly service, the form being retained when the significance of the action was lost. In addition to this, we must observe that David found the ark, not only still at Kirjath-jearim, but still in "the house of Abinadab;" and if we give due weight to this consideration, there will seem a strong ground for the conclusion, that it had never been restored to its former curtained enclosure. This, at least, is certain, that from the time of the ark's removal to the battlefield before Aphek, its history and that of the tabernacle never again coincide in the sacred page. We find reference now to the one, and now to the other; but no distinct trace of both, in one and the same connection, until the Mosaic tent was rolled up, and carried as a mere relic into that more substantial building to which it had given place.

In regarding the events that befell the symbol of God's presence among His people, we have to look on its protracted sojourn at Kirjath-baalah as a season almost entirely devoid of incident. On one occasion only, during three quarters of a century, do we find an intimation which favors the idea of its temporary removal from the house of Abinadab. Of this we will hereafter speak. In the meanwhile, let us glance at the state of things which accompanied and characterized this deprivation of religious ordinances. The nation seems to have been in a spiritual lethargy. Having first lost sight of God's presence, and then lost the possession of that which most perceptibly symbolized it, their superstitious reverence had degenerated into a semi-infidel forgetfulness. God had hidden His face from them; but they knew it not. Year after year passed on; public ordinances were either neglected, or found to be a mere shell whose kernel was removed. An awakening came at last: the people "lamented after the Lord." They awoke to the conviction that Jehovah was not with them as in the days of old, and the conviction wrought sorrow; but the sorrow wrought no permanent effect for good. The ark was still neglected, the Holy of Holies was still vacant. Missing the token of their heavenly Ruler's presence, they mistakenly sought to rear a throne for an earthly monarch; and "the glory of Israel" was again forgotten. The history of the ark during the reign of their earliest king is given in the mournful avowal,

"We enquired not at it in the days of Saul."*1 Chron. xiii. 8.* Well would it have been had they sooner come to the resolve, "Let us bring it unto us again." Impotent and idle was the lamentation which vented itself in fruitless tears, instead of exciting to holy resolutions and manful efforts. Had they in Samuel's day sought the public reinstatement of the missing pledge, the twenty would not have been followed by an extra fifty years' privation of its solace.

Here, again, we remark that there are similar seasons in the Christian's spiritual life,-seasons when the light of Jehovah's countenance is turned away. We believe that usually, if not always, the origin and continuance of this melancholy state lie with the believer himself. We speak not now of a wholly different order of experience, in which physical disease has induced erroneous impressions, and the sufferer imagines God's presence withdrawn, because its manifestation is not realized by a soul whose morbid condition bars the door to felicity of every kind. We refer now to the case of those whose capabilities of enjoyment are unimpaired, who can enter with keen relish into all their favorite pursuits, who are in the full vigor of life and health, but who derive no profit from God's ordinances, take no delight in His word, find no pleasure in communion with Him as once they did. Rare indeed are the instances in which this can be traced to a mere act of divine sovereignty; few the Christians so eminent, that they are called to pass through such discipline for the sake of others only. Without absolutely denying the possibility of such cases, we may yet safely take it for granted, that none of our readers dare to arrogate to themselves so peculiar a position. Self-knowledge will enable most, if not all of us, to see reasons manifold and amply sufficient to account for the loss of that blessedness we knew when first we saw the Lord. It is likely enough that we are unprepared to lay our finger on one special act of iniquity, and pronounce that to be the cause of our abandonment. Our backsliding may have been very gradual. We may by slow degrees have lost the vision of God's truth, and not, as the Israelites, lost the ark in one grand disastrous conflict. For a long while we may have been unconscious of our loss, as the Israelites were forgetful of theirs. God may have hid His face, and we may nevertheless have gone on frowardly in the way of our heart. Have we been at length aroused? are we lamenting after the Lord? are we exclaiming, "Oh! that I knew where I might find Him! that I

might come even to His seat! Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; on the left hand, where He doth work, but I cannot behold Him; He hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him?" Is this a mere profession of sorrow, or are we truly instituting a deep, active, earnest search after God? At such a crisis, much depends on the course that is taken. Let the mind nurse a sentimental grief, and weep, and sigh, and seek to human advisers, and put away a few glaring evils, and then rest content, like Israel of old, with God's presence unrestored,---and like Israel, we may sink into a deeper and a longer slumber than the first. An appeal is made to us to open the door, that we may let Him in who alone can bless us; but if now we slothfully refuse, we may hereafter rise to open to Him, and find He has "withdrawn himself and gone." On the other hand, let the soul be fully possessed with holy longings of desire, let it be fired with strong determination, girt up to fervent entreaty, and animated with a godly zeal,---then shall we find that, drawing near to Him, He will draw near to us, and returning to Him, He will heal our backslidings, and love us freely, and be to us again as the dew, causing us to grow as the lily, and to cast forth our roots as Lebanon. Let none delay thus to find,---by delaying thus to seek Him. His absence has enfeebled us, it is true; we are shorn of our strength; but we can come to Him in our weakness, if we are but willing to be made strong. It will not do to fold our hands. We may offer the petition, "Draw us," but we must be prepared heartily to add the requisite promise, "Draw us, and we will run after thee." We may say, "Tell us, Oh thou whom our soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon;" but if we wish to reach the spot, we must obey the direction given us, and "go forth by the footsteps of the flock." If we prize the ark of God's presence, we must prove our value for it by promptly arising to take measures for its recovery.

Chapter 16 - The Ark at Gibeah; or, God's Presence Fitfully Sought

THE ARK AT GIBEAH

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE FITFULLY SOUGHT.

ONE of the numerous difficulties which present themselves in studying the consecutive history of the ark is found in connection with an event which took place during the reign of Saul. That monarch was encamped with a small force at Gibeah, while the Philistine army held possession of Michmash. Jonathan and his armor-bearer, unknown to the king or the people, had gone on a private expedition, had daringly forced their way into the enemy's garrison, and had attacked them with a slaughter so unexpected and disastrous, that it created a panic through the host, and caused every man's sword to be turned against his fellow, friends mistaken for foes in the confusion that prevailed. The stir was perceived by Israel's watchmen, and the absence of the youthful warriors was ascertained. Saul was in a perplexity; he longed to rush upon the enemy, and to relieve the venturesome heroes who had hazarded so great a risk. But "neither sword nor spear was found in the hand of any of the people," the Philistine policy having availed to reduce them to this condition of utter defenselessness. What course was to be pursued? In his strait, the monarch bethought him of Jehovah's power. If God were with him, could not five of his little band chase a hundred, and a hundred of them put ten thousand to flight? He turned to the priest, saying, "Bring hither the ark of God." *1 Sam. xiv. 18-46.* Here again we meet with the phrase, "for the ark of God was at that time with the children of Israel." How, why, or when the ark was brought to Gibeah is unrecorded, and by some the fact is denied. The Septuagint has "Bring hither the ephod;" but this reading is unsupported. Others interpret the words as having reference to some coffer in which the ephod was kept; but we cannot believe that to such would have been applied the specific and emphatic title, "the ark *of God."* There seems no legitimate mode of avoiding the conclusion, that the sacred symbol had been temporarily removed from the neighboring city of Kirjath-jearim, and located

in the vicinity of the camp, between Migron and Gibeah of Benjamin. What was Saul's motive for uttering the command, "Bring hither the ark," we cannot positively decide; but we are free to surmise, that it may have been somewhat in the same spirit which had led to its removal from Shiloh.

The royal order does not seem to have met with an instant compliance. It may be that Ahiah ventured to remonstrate. His own family-history would come to his recollection; the death of both his grand-parents, and that of his great-grandfather Eli, would be recalled, as well as the national disgrace memorialized in the expressive name of his uncle Ichabod; and, however unwilling the Philistines might be to repossess themselves of the trophy, the high priest would be yet more unwilling to expose "the glory of Israel" to the risk of falling again into their hands. From some cause, at all events, the colloquy was prolonged; and ere it was ended, the king's attention was arrested by the growing tumult and confusion in the enemy's ranks. Filled with eager impatience and sanguine hope, he set aside his newly formed project, not through fear of endangering the ark's safety, but from the notion that he could dispense with its aid. "Withdraw thine hand," he said to the yielding priest, who was about to execute his mandate; and summoning his six hundred men, he went forth to the conflict. Voluntary recruits soon swelled his ranks, and the Philistines were forced to betake themselves to rapid flight. Saul would have pursued them through the live-long night, despite the faintness and fatigue of his troops; but Ahiah interposed the salutary advice, "Let us draw near hither unto God." Then, as the king's representative, he stood before the ark, and proposed the king's inquiry. But from within the veil, no answering voice was returned; by the Urim and Thummim was no response obtainable. It might have been easy to discover a cause for the Divine silence. The monarch's forgetfulness of God, his neglect of divine ordinances, his rash oath, his selfish desire of vengeance on his foes, made up a list of crimes, anyone of which had been sufficient to account for the non-reception of his suit. He was regarding iniquity in his heart, and the Lord would not hear him. Blinded by his self-confidence, and desirous to convict the offender for whose sin they were thus punished, he called together a public assembly, and ordered the lot to be cast. On Jonathan it fell, not indeed to denote that in God's esteem the latter had been actually chargeable with guilt in the breach of an unknown precept, but to awaken in

Saul's mind a consciousness of his arbitrary command, and the yet more arbitrary penalty which he had annexed to the violation of it. At the intercession of the people, the young prince's life was spared; whereupon Saul refrained from further pursuit of the enemy, and returned to his usual abode. But we read not that he again thought of the ark of God. Its presence no longer required in the camp, and no order being issued for its better lodgment, it seems to have been quietly restored to its former abode in the dwelling of Abinadab. Nor do we ever read again of any solicitude for it, or any desire after it, on the part of Saul. He had called for its help, in a moment of despair; he had spurned that help, in the succeeding moment of restored confidence. As he had sought Samuel at the first only for the sake of his father's asses, so he had now sought the ark only for the furthering of his worldly interests. Hence the vacillation which he displayed. His fears quieted, he cared not for the Lord's assistance.

In this respect, there are many like him;---many who, according to the prophet's language, assemble themselves to God for corn and wine, and yet rebel against Him;---or who use religion only to drown their fears, willing to accept it as a palladium, loath to take it upon them as a yoke. This is often the secret of a fitful devotion. As long as there is a powerful impulse from without---as long as there is the urgency of fear, or the hope of profit, or the influence of friendship, or the desire of approbation, to stimulate to the pursuit of piety, so long there is a semblance of seeking after God, there is a maintenance of all the external acts of godliness, nay more, there may be a really strong desire to be made partaker of the benefits which accompany salvation. But where there is nothing more, this will eventually die out. The withdrawal of that foreign impulse, the quelling of that anxiety, the opening up of some other way to greatness, the loss of friendly counselors and pious advisers, the self-satisfaction resulting from a position already gained, from a good name already won, and from a competence already amassed, will be apt to develop the true carnality of the heart. Not at once, perhaps, but gradually, will prayer be restrained. One by one will religious habits be dropped. More and more will God's ordinances be neglected. Those who had run well, or had seemed to run well, will be hindered. The seed may have put forth some visible shoots; but these will presently wither away before the rising sun, because they have no deepness of earth. There has been no vitality of

principle, no fixedness of purpose, no rightly-motived choice of God and His service. Selfishness has been the only impelling force; the earthly has been more cared for than the heavenly; present peace more aimed at than future welfare; personal interests more kept in view than God's glory. It is unquestionable, that the first inducements to a truly religious life may often be no higher; but the genuine religion which may thus have been originated, always rises to something far beyond. If terror leads us to the Savior's feet, it is love that alone keeps us there. If promises of earthly good first attract the soul to listen to the claims of truth, that truth, received into the heart, will fill it with the bright hopes of celestial blessedness, and rouse it to hold fast the beginning of its confidence steadfast unto the end. If immediate ease of conscience is the earliest blessing the returning sinner seeks, an after-life of growing holiness is what the true penitent desires. If his own safety is what the believer first prizes, his Master's honor subsequently becomes the highest incitement to his efforts, and the noblest burden of his petitions.

Here, then, we find the test of a thriving or unhealthy state of soul. Is our religion a thing dependent on frames and moods, or on firm and stable principle? is it cultivated by fits and starts, or can we say, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark"? Is our piety an inconstant stream, now swollen into a winter torrent by life's storms and tempests, and then exhaling like the summer brook in the sunshine of prosperity,---or is it in us a well of water steadily and continuously springing up into everlasting life? Is it a vessel, whose sails are idly flapped by the veering gale of human applause,---or whose onward and rapid progress is secured by the heavenward-guiding influences of God's Holy Spirit? On the satisfactory answer to these inquiries depends the establishment of our claim to be among the number of those who "go on unto perfection." The" called" and the "chosen" are they who are also "faithful." If a Demas forsakes the good cause, it is because of "having loved this present world." If a Paul has fought the good fight, and finished his course, and kept the faith, it is because to him Christ has been "all in all." To seek after the Lord with fickleness and vacillation, is to prove that we have no real appreciation of His character. To seek His presence with persevering importunity, as the blessing we daily and hourly crave, is an essential proof that we value communion with the Most

High. It is alike the privilege and the characteristic of the upright, that they *"dwell* in His presence," that they *"abide* under the shadow of the Almighty." It is not in seasons of danger only that they repair to His throne; for it is theirs to say, "I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand; thou shalt guide me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."

Chapter 17 - The Ark at Nachon's Threshing Floor; or, God's Presence Mistrusted

THE ARK AT NACHON'S THRESHING-FLOOR;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE MISTRUSTED.

THE first act of David, when fully established on the throne, was to stir up the people to a lively interest in the long-neglected ark of God. Willing to give them a share in the work of its public restoration, he sought their counsel and assistance. He "consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader. And David said unto all the congregation of Israel, If it seem good unto you, and that it be of the Lord our God, let us send abroad unto our brethren everywhere, that are left in all the land of Israel, and with them also to the priests and Levites which are in their cities and suburbs, that they may gather themselves unto us: and let us bring again the ark of our God." *1 Chron. Xiii. 1-11, and 2 Sam. vi. 1-8.* The proposal was cordially approved. A grand national assembly was convened. From the remotest parts of the land, flocked willing spectators to join in the procession; and with 30,000 men, David started for Kirjath-baal, "to bring up thence the ark of God, before which the name, even the name of the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims, was called upon." The zeal of that day, however, was "not according to knowledge:" In bringing the ark "out of the house of Abinadab that was in the hill," they transgressed the law of its conveyance. Instead of having it borne by staves on the shoulders of ministering Levites, they "set it upon a cart,"---a "new" cart, indeed, for they wished to do it honor, while yet they forgot that such was not the mode prescribed for its removal. The Philistines had known no better; the men of Israel knew, or ought to have known. The ignorance of the latter, if ignorance at all, was inexcusable, and therefore culpable. We are next informed, that Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, and successors probably of Eleazar in the guardianship of the ark beneath their father's roof, accompanied it on the

way, and undertook the duty of guiding the cart,---Ahio advancing first to clear the road, and Uzzah walking by the side to urge or to restrain the oxen. Whether these brothers were Levites, is somewhat uncertain. They are usually considered to have been such. The notion rests on the statement of Josephus; but is also in accordance with the fact that no stranger might approach the ark, and live. Whether they were Kohathites, is another and still more doubtful matter. If otherwise, there was here another irregularity in the proceedings of the day. There was no longer the plea of necessity for the sons of Abinadab to wait on the holy things, since priests and Levites were in attendance; and we can only surmise that Uzzah and Ahio were desirous thus to testify the willingness with which they resigned the private custody of a charge that rightfully belonged to the nation at large. So far, the motives of all appear to have been sincere and becoming. So far, likewise, the God who is merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness, accepted the worshippers, and forbore to visit them for these minor deviations from the path of ceremonial duty. Joy reigned in every heart, and amid the blending of vocal and instrumental music, the gladsome march progressed. "The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; among them were the damsels playing with timbrels." The words of Moses may again have been pronounced, "Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered; let them also that hate him flee before him:"---and the sublime ode may have been sung which David had prefaced with the same appropriate utterance. *Ps. lxviii. 1, 25.*

But a sudden and a grievous interruption was at hand. On reaching the threshing-floor of Nachon (otherwise called Chidon), situated probably in or near Jerusalem, the stumbling of the oxen shook the cart; whereon Uzzah put forth his hand, and laid hold of the ark to steady it. Then "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." As to the mode of this sudden death, there have been various idle conjectures, on which it is needless to enter. The moral causes of it require a little investigation. It may be premised, that the representations found of ancient carts, used for sacred purposes, lead to the supposition, that the one employed on this occasion was a kind of mere platform on wheels; in which case, it is easy to understand that it was impossible for Uzzah to effect his object by laying hold on the staves. The

question, therefore, resolves itself into this: *Wherein lay the sin of putting forth a helping hand?* was it mistaken zeal that it was so fearfully punished? or was heedlessness the crime that lay at the offender's door? Was this judgment inflicted merely for Israel's sake? or were there secret heart-evils, which stamped Uzzah's outward act with moral turpitude, and called down upon him this severe punition? Two considerations present themselves in reply, It is observable, in the first place, that this act of disobedience was more direct and glaring than those which had preceded it. The touching of the ark, and the looking upon it, were the two things expressly prohibited under pain of death. The mode of carrying was more of a precautionary rule laid down to guard against the danger of violating the former precepts. The disregard of the one would often, as in this case, lead on to the breach of the other. Uzzah knew the fearful penalty; how durst he incur it? This leads us to notice, secondly, the probability that there was some lurking sin in his heart, of which this external act was but the casual development. It must be remembered by us, that even a good intention cannot justify a bad action; for if men do evil that good may come, "their damnation is just." On analyzing Uzzah's crime, however, we may detect something amiss in his feelings as well as in his doings. If pride had risen up, if he had indulged in self-complacency at being thus publicly recognized as official keeper of the ark, it is easy to see how the way was paved for his presumption. But whatever may have led to his rashness, we trace in it the repetition of evils which have already come under our notice; we perceive the same irreverence and familiarity that had brought down a great slaughter on the Bethshemites; and we wonder not that Jehovah saw it needful to vindicate anew the honor of His sacred footstool. In Uzzah's conduct, however, we may discern yet another sin. While it was irreverence that emboldened him to touch the ark, it was *unbelief* that occasioned the wish to do so. If he contemned God's presence, he was equally guilty of mistrusting it. Had he remembered for whom that precious coffer had been set apart, and who it was that had deigned to make it the ensign of His presence, he would have felt that no help of man, certainly no unlawful help of man, was needed to ensure its safety.

This view of the prominent feature in Uzzah's sin affords an important lesson. There are many occasions, on which we are tempted to repeat his error. We oft-times mistrust God's presence with His word. We hear of infidel

objections to the inspired volume, or of scientific discoveries which threaten to contravene its statements; and we are in danger of putting forth an unhallowed finger, and making use of unwarrantable efforts to defend it, by a hasty, and therefore, oft-times erroneous interpretation of its words. Let patience have her perfect work, and let God be trusted with the care of His own truth. We are to stand fast for the faith as "once delivered to the saints," and not to concern ourselves overmuch for the harmonizing of it with man's reasonings or man's researches. If the latter be truthful, we shall ere long find that they in no wise run counter to God's written Revelation. If they' be false, they will fall to the ground, while the fortress of Scripture remains impregnable. It has been well said, in reference to the apparent conflicts of science and theology, "To dread anything, to wish that anything which has been patiently sought or honestly won, should be ignored or kept back, betrays an extreme weakness: Christ has not laid His hand on us with power, or we should not be so easily persuaded to believe His cause tottering, or His truth endangered." He who has commanded us to "go and teach all nations" the gospel of His grace, has also given us the assurance, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world;" and to imagine or to fear that anything can ever arise in the course of time's fleeting cycles to demolish or to supersede that message of salvation, is to doubt the fulfillment of a promise which was purposely made to be coeval with the world's duration. As long as He is with His people---and that is as long as earth shall stand,---so long must His word remain proof against all the malice of demons, and all the machinations of the ungodly.

But, again, we are in danger of mistrusting God's presence with His church. We behold her imperiled, and we are prone to take false steps for her preservation. We see the world taking arms against her, and we are apt to temporize, to call bitter sweet and sweet bitter, to make concessions that are inconsistent with God's claims upon us, and to sound a jubilant note of triumph over what is but a hollow, as it is an ill-gotten peace. Or we behold the church enfeebled, we see one good man after another cut off, and we try to swell the numbers by opening wider and yet wider the gate of Christian profession. We seek the co-operation of worldly men, that we may bring over their gold into the church's treasury, and introduce their carnal policy into the church's councils, and win their influence in the church's behalf. But whether

we see the church assailed, or whether we see her ranks diminished, it becomes us to put our trust in Jehovah, and not in an arm of flesh. Prudent measures we may use, but nothing that involves the abandonment of principle---nothing that amalgamates the precious with the vile---nothing that will facilitate the sowing of tares among the wheat. God has loved His church with an everlasting love, and will love her throughout all futurity. She is founded on an immoveable rock, therefore "the gates of hell shall not prevail" against her. "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; He shall help her, and that right early." He walks "in the midst of the golden candlesticks," and has unlimited power to protect them from extinction. If "the godly man ceaseth," we are yet permitted to cry, and shall not cry in vain, "Help, Lord." Finally; we may learn to beware of mistrusting God's presence with ourselves. We may have interests dearer to us than was the ark to Uzzah; and, like him, we may be disposed to take sinful measures in the hope of averting their threatened overthrow. Such a course will but serve to bring down a judgment. Those who "refuse the waters of Shiloah that go softly," and seek for aid more evidently rapid and energetic, shall find that swift and sure destruction will overtake them, when "the Lord bringeth upon them the waters of the river, strong and many," to carry them away "as with a flood." When there is no lawful path open for us to tread, our "strength is to sit still." When no human aid can be sinlessly rendered, then "it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait" for the deliverance God can bestow. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even forever: for the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous, lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity: as for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity; but peace shall be upon Israel."

Chapter 18 - The Ark in the House of Obed-Edom; or, God's Presence a Blessing to the Right-Hearted

THE ARK IN THE HOUSE OF OBED-EDOM;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE A BLESSING TO THE

RIGHT-HEARTED.

THE first effect of Uzzah's death upon the royal mind was to produce in David vexation of spirit. *2 Sam. vi. 8-19.* He could not brook this unexpected cross, coming (as it did) just when he thought he was doing God service. Instead, therefore, of being humbled by a sense of sin, he was "displeased," as though the dispensation of divine wrath had been ill-timed and undeserved. So erroneous a view of Jehovah's dealing led to the indulgence of a slavish fear. Under the spirit of bondage, David "was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark come to me?" Put in a different frame of mind, and intended in a different sense, this inquiry would have been proper enough---"*How* shall the ark come?" What are the injunctions God has laid down? "to the law and to the testimony;" in His appointed way let Him be served, and no longer after the devices of human wisdom! Not thus did the king speak. "How shall the *ark* come to me?" was the language of his terror; and he resolved that it should not come at all. "David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of David; but carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite." This worthy Levite, [*1 Chron. xv. 17, 18.]* a native of the Kohathite city, Gathrimmon, *[Josh. xxi. 20-25.]* received it with gladness. He was acquainted with its past history; he knew how the Philistines had been smitten, how the men of Beth-shemesh had been slain, how Uzzah had been struck dead, and how David's soul was filled with apprehension. But none of these things moved him; since he was well aware, that for each of these judgments there had been a cause. He knew that the ark was in itself a symbol of mercy, not of judgment; and that if, in its behalf, the latter had been displayed by God, it was because the former had been abused

by man. Belonging to the tribe and family set apart for attendance upon the ark. and conscious of a heartfelt reverence for Jehovah, no less than a firm affiance on his protecting care, Obed-edom was devoid of all alarm. He had that holy fear which would lead him to honor the token of God's earthly presence; he had not that sinful fear which would have led him to shrink from it. The event fully justified his joyous confidence: "the ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months,"---a period not merely exempt from evils, but especially crowned with good, for "the Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his household." We might dwell here on the importance of domestic religion. We might recommend the establishment of a family altar, that in united devotions the presence of God might be invoked, and a family blessing besought. We might dwell on the responsibility resting on the heads of families, and the blessing or the curse which their piety or their worldliness is likely to entail on their children. But these remarks are so obvious, and have been so often handled, that we shall pass on to the main theme which we have proposed for the improvement of this section, and for which we shall pave the way by noticing the yet more widespread effect which Obed-edom's example ultimately produced.

So sudden and surprising was the prosperity of this heaven-blessed household, that the attention of their neighbors was excited. It became the subject of public talk; till eventually the rumor reached the palace, and even the ears of David himself. There was no misrepresentation, no concealment of the truth. The king was plainly told, that this had occurred "because of the ark of God." The intelligence was received in a proper spirit. Renewed desire took the place of abject fear; but it was a desire which was now regulated by the word and will of Jehovah. Preparations were carefully made, that the solemnity of bringing the ark to Zion might be according to rule. *1 Chron. xv. 1-29.* It was not enough that a new tabernacle should be made for its reception; due provision must be made for its conveyance. At the king's command, 862 Levites were assembled in addition to the descendants of Aaron. Then addressing himself to the two senior priests, and the six heads of the Levitical families, he uttered words of monitory exhortation: "Ye are the chief of the fathers of the Levites; sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the ark of the Lord God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it; for because ye did it not at first, the Lord our

God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not after the due order."

It was a useful lesson David had learned. God's goodness had led him to repentance. The benefits conferred on Obed-edom had taught the monarch how to interpret the stroke which had fallen on Uzzah. No longer neglectful of duty, no longer resentful of the check he had received, no longer timorous of entertaining the ark, he now evinced a well regulated zeal. Every detail was looked to with his own eye, and carried out according to his command. The appointment of Chenaniah, as director of the music---the selection of Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, as leaders of the choir---the distribution of the eight players on the psaltery who should sing the treble, and the six harpers whose voices were to take the bass---the instructions given to the priests to blow with their trumpets---and the assignment to Berechiah and Elkanah, Obed-edom and Jehiah, of their respective positions as "doorkeepers for the ark," to prevent the approach of unhallowed footsteps,---all these things mark the minuteness of care, with which every preliminary arrangement was made. The procession was again public and joyous. Crowds having flocked to the metropolis, "David, and the elders of Israel, and the captains over thousands, went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the house of Obed-edom with joy." And" the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded, according to the word of the Lord." Some trepidation there could not fail to be, at the first. The memory of the former ceremonial would be vividly recalled, when the festive throng was re-assembled, and the notes of joyous music once more re-echoed. Every eye must have been strained with an eager gaze upon the onward progress of those who were the bearers of the ark. But" God helped the Levites." The sacred burden was lifted, and no injury ensued; it was carried forth from Obed-edom's house, and no judgment was poured out. There was hope for Israel now, though a hope blended with deep conviction of unworthiness. No sooner, therefore, had the ark been borne six paces, than the march was arrested; and in token alike of penitence for their past disobedience, gratitude for present mercy, and earnest entreaty for future acceptance, seven bullocks and seven rams were offered as a sacrifice. Then was the ark of the testimony brought "with shouting, and with sound of the cornet, and with trumpets, and with cymbals" into the city of David. Unconcerned spectators there might be, with hearts devoid of pious

sympathy, like Michal, who looked forth from the window to gaze upon the show; but most bosoms glowed with a fervent gladness and a holy rejoicing.

The streets of the city traversed, and the new tabernacle neared, the question might well be asked, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in His holy place?" Deeply solemn, yet sweetly re-assuring would be the responsive strain, "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully, he shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation," while another voice or chorus took up the theme, "This is the generation of them that seek thee, that seek thy face, Oh God of Jacob." Arrived at the sacred enclosure, the Levites had to demand admission: "Lift up your heads, Oh ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." The inquiry was put, "Who is this King of glory?" and the bearers of the ark replied, "The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle." A second time, therefore, was the right of entrance claimed; "Lift up your heads, Oh ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in." Once more was the question asked, "Who is this King of glory?" and again was the impressive answer returned, "The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory." No musical composition could have been more fitted to impress the minds of the people with the greatness of Him who that day fixed his residence on Mount Zion, than was this inspired ode of David, which we may fairly suppose to have been written for the occasion. *Ps.xxiv.*

When the ark had been deposited at the inner end of the tent, the rites of public worship were resumed. God was "gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet." He was sitting "on the throne of His holiness;" and "the princes of the people" were" gathered together, even the people of the God of Abraham." *Ps. xvlii.* Burnt sacrifices and peace offerings were presented; while psalms of praise were sung in honor of Jehovah's name. *1 Chron. xvi.* "Seek ye the Lord, and *His strength,"* was a sound which fell appropriately on the ear: for such was the title whereby the ark was known. "Seek His face *continually,"* was a seasonable exhortation; for now the ordinances of religion were again to find a constant celebration. "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness," was a precept to which every heart would respond, when thrilled

with emotion at the consciousness of the dangers to which an irreverent worship would that day have exposed them. "Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for- ever," was a summons which they would cordially obey, in view of that day's special deliverance. Hence, when the singers had closed their strain with the ascription, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel forever and ever," we are not surprised that the universal "Amen" of the people testified to their hearty concurrence. Then David invoked on them the Divine benediction; and each having received his portion of the meat of the peace offerings, together with a loaf of bread and a flagon of wine, "they departed every man to his house." Thus closed the day of solemn service; and thus was it clearly proved that while the ark was indeed a terror to the evil- doer, it was a minister of good to them who obeyed God's law.

As under the Old, so under the New dispensation, may one and the same thing be to some men a curse, and to others a blessing. It is thus with the gospel itself. "The preaching of the cross is, to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us, which are saved, it is the power of God." "To the one we are the savor of death unto death, and to the other the savor of life unto life." "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them;" but "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The Savior himself was "set for the fall, and for the rising again, of many in Israel." "Unto them which believe, He is precious, but unto them which be disobedient, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence."

The presence of God, like the truth of God, has a twofold aspect. As it is unwelcome to' the sinner, and forebodes him ill, so it is a joy to the penitent, obedient heart, and betokens an abundant blessing;---

"Yet is He still

Himself the same, one form, one face, one willj

And these His twofold aspects are but one j

And change is none

In Him; for not [in God such] change can be!

The Immutable is He."

The cause of the difference lies ever in ourselves. "With the pure," said the Psalmist, "thou wilt show thyself pure, but with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward." "Oh house of Israel," asked Jehovah, "are not my ways equal? Are not your ways unequal?" Then let us not be found shrinking from God with a guilty fear. Let us seek Him, but let us take care that it be in His own appointed way. To seek Him through any good works of our own, to entreat His favor as the recompense of our fancied righteousness---this will provoke Him to jealousy, and expose us to deserved wrath. To seek Him through the Son of His love, according to the command given us that we believe in His name---to seek Him as penitent sinners, trusting in His promise that He will cast out none who come through Christ-to seek Him, conscious of our own demerits, but confiding in the all-sufficiency of Him who died as a sacrifice on Calvary---to seek Him with self-abasement, and yet with the full assurance of hope---to seek Him with the earnest clinging of reverential love---this is the only way to find Him. And thus to find Him will be to inherit the richest of blessings.

"Unto the righteous spirit how benign

His awful countenance,

Where, tempering justice with parental love,

Goodness, and heavenly grace,

And sweetest mercy shine!"

When thus we view His character, as the God of our salvation, our" soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and our mouth shall praise Him with joyful lips: because He has been our help, therefore in the shadow of His wings shall we rejoice." We shall "walk in the light of His countenance;" in His name shall we rejoice all the day; in His righteousness shall we be exalted; the Lord will be our defense, and the Holy One of Israel our King.

Chapter 19 - The Ark of Mount Zion; or, God's Presence in the Sanctuary

THE ARK OF MOUNT ZION;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE SANCTUARY.

WHEN the ark had been lodged in the tabernacle on Mount Zion, it was no longer forgotten. We read of those "whom David set over the service of song in the house of the Lord, after that the ark had rest," *1 Chron. vi. 31.* Asaph and his brethren ministering "before the ark continually, as every day's work required." *1 Chron. xvi. 4, 37.* Nor, when these arrangements had been made, did the king think all his duty ended. The skill of Tyrian workmen had erected for him a sumptuous palace; and as he sat at ease beneath its roof of cedar, sheltered from the storm and shaded from the sun, his thoughts recurred to the earthly dwelling place of the King of kings. "See," he said to Nathan, "I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." *2 Sam. vii. 2.*It was a natural and a seemly thought. A tabernacle was a dwelling well suited for the changeful life of the desert; but a temple would be more fitting for the permanent residence of Jehovah in the royal city. "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart to build a house for my name," was the commendatory message that God sent him; while yet, not for him, but for Solomon, his son, was the honor reserved. The zeal of David was unabated by the prohibition. That he might not build the temple was no reason why he should cease to prize the ark. The value which he set upon it is discoverable from the notices we meet with in his writings. Not only does he refer again and again to the tabernacle as the house of God, but he repeatedly uses expressions which clearly indicate that his thoughts centered in the ark, as the token of God's presence. "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place*where thine honor dwelleth." Ps. xxvi. 8.* "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to

enquire in his temple; for in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his *pavilion,* in the *secret* of his tabernacle shall he hide me." "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God; *he heard my voice out of his temple,* and my cry came *before him,* even into his ears." "Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward *thy holy oracle."* "I will abide in thy tabernacle forever; I will trust *in the covert of thy wings."* "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord: our feet shall stand within thy gates, Oh Jerusalem: Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together, whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the *testimony* of Israel." "How amiable are thy tabernacles, Oh Lord of hosts! blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee! they go from strength to strength; everyone of them in Zion appeareth *before God."* "Praise waiteth for thee; Oh God, in Zion, and unto thee shall the vow be performed; Oh thou *that hearest prayer,* unto *thee* shall all flesh come." "Sing praises unto the Lord, which *dwelleth* in Zion." "Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at *his footstool;* exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy hill."

It is manifest that the attraction of David's soul toward the tabernacle arose from the fact of God's presence above the mercy-seat. He thought of it as Jehovah's dwelling place, as the place of the holy oracle, as the place of prayer and praise.

Such, likewise, should be our estimate of the sanctuary. It is only as we consider it to be "the house of God," that we shall find it "the gate of heaven." In our churches and chapels we have no golden coffer, no sacred mercy-seat, no over-shadowing cherubim, no oracular responses; but what these betokened we yet possess, and in a fullness unknown to the ancient Jew. Our places of worship have been consecrated, or set apart to God's service. Publicly has His presence been invoked. We have blended our voices, it may be, in the song of welcome, and have joined to utter the entreaty,

" Enter with all thy glorious train,

Thy Spirit and thy word;

All that the ark did once contain

Could no such grace afford."

Though we have not the treasured pot of manna, we have the promise, "I will

abundantly bless her provision; I will satisfy her poor with bread." Though not the almond branch of Aaron, yet have we the assurance, "I will also clothe her priests with salvation." Though not the testimony inscribed on tables of stone, yet we have the declaration, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their heart." Though not an audible voice from between the cherubim, or a miraculous answer by the ephod, yet we have given to us "some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Though the glorious Shechinah is withdrawn, we are not left without the blessed intimation, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." But do we find these promises fulfilled, and these benefits enjoyed, in our experience? do we seek their realization? do we go up to the courts of the Lord with the joyous expectation of meeting Him there? do we enter into the exercises of public worship with the full conviction of His more immediate presence? do we sing His praises with the firm belief that His ear is open to receive our homage? do we offer our supplications with the implicit confidence that He is waiting to be gracious? do we listen to the explanations of His word, as heaven-sent messages for the solving of our perplexities, or for the guidance of our devious steps? Only thus can we "behold His beauty in the temple," only thus can we be "abundantly satisfied with the fatness of His house." It is true, our God is unseen, His presence unrevealed to mortal eye; but so it was under the Jewish economy, as well as under the Christian. The Israelite saw much, yet that which he looked upon was but type and symbol. The outward rites and frequent ceremonies enjoined upon him may have been requisite to impress the groveling uncultured mind of his age with a sense of God's sanctity and greatness; but, as we have already seen, and as we cannot too constantly remember, they brought him none the nearer to a vision of God's face. The ark was unseen, it was behind a veil, and even had it been exposed to view, it was not divine. The glory-cloud was seen at rare and distant intervals; but that cloud was only a screen to hide the Invisible. As truly, therefore, as Jehovah was in the tabernacle on Zion, so truly is He still in the midst of every worshipping Christian assembly---unseen then, as He is now---but accessible now, as He was then. Reader, have you "seen the goings of your God and King in the sanctuary"? have you felt the nearness of His presence? have you rejoiced in

it? have you learned to love His house, because it is the spot where He oftenest unveils His face to the spiritual perceptions of the believing heart? We leave the question with you. Ponder it. And let your resolve be, that you will henceforth always plead for the manifestation of His presence, when you go to unite with the great congregation in the services of His earthly temple. Then will you find a yet better blessing than that which rested on Obededom's house; for "the Lord loveth the gates of Zion," even "more than the dwellings of Jacob."

Chapter 20 - The Ark Beyond Kidrom; or, God's Presence Universal

THE ARK BEYOND KIDRON;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE UNIVERSAL.

THERE is some uncertainty as to the precise meaning of Uriah's words, when he said to King David, " The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields: shall I then go into mine house?" The most natural, as well as the most common opinion is, that, on this occasion, the ark had been sent to accompany the army which was besieging Rabbah. If this be a correct supposition, there will yet be found difficulties in accounting for such a measure. The experience of the past had demonstrated the danger of placing confidence in the ark, as though it were of itself a safe-guard; and to have taken it from Mount Zion, in order that the army might have opportunity of offering sacrifices, would not seem to have been in strict accordance with the divine rule, that such service should be celebrated only in one hallowed spot. At the same time, we may bear in mind, that in the present case the Israelites were carrying on a foreign invasion, and that it was likely to be a prolonged warfare. It may perhaps have been thought, that the law concerning the place of sacrifice had reference only to their sojourn within the boundaries of Canaan, and that if any national enterprise led them beyond Jordan, they were justified in taking with them the sacred memorial *of* Almighty protection, the sanctuary of Jehovah's presence. The fact, moreover, that the tabernacle of Moses, with the brazen altar, still remained at Gibeon, where it was accessible to those who tarried at home, might confer a greater plausibility on the expedient. However this may have been, and whether the ark was still on Mount Zion, or whether it was a visitant in the territory of Ammon, it is clear that the words of David's noble minded general ought to have come home with force to his heart. Once the king had judged that a cedar palace was unfit for royalty while the greatest earthly treasure of the nation had but curtains

for its canopy; and now he hears the warrior, whom he would fain allure to self-indulgence, refusing to enjoy the comforts of his humbler abode, because the army was exposed to hardship, and the ark had found no temple-home. Not yet, however, was the backsliding monarch's conscience roused; not yet did he see and own the enormity of his guilt.

We pass on to another mention of the ark, more easy of interpretation. David had confessed his sin, and found forgiveness; but it was needful that discipline should yet be administered, in order that both himself and his people might learn how evil a thing it is to forsake the living God. One of the bitterest ingredients in his cup of sorrow was Absalom's unnatural rebellion. Driven in his declining years from his palace, from his throne, and from his capital, the monarch took his mournful way across the brook Kidron, with his face toward the Mount of Olives. He was not alone in his flight: his household, his servants, his faithful soldiers and devoted friends collected round him, ready to tender him their sympathy and their assistance. The priests were no less zealous than the people. "Lo, Zadok also, and all the Levites, were with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God; and they set down the ark." Zadok's colleague---(for at this time there were two high-priests, one descended from Eleazar, and the other from Ithamar)---acted in concert with' him: "Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city." Having seen the ark safely carried across the brook, and stationed in the plain beyond it, he returned and took some elevated position whence he might superintend the exit of David's followers from the town. During his absence, the monarch interposed an authoritative prohibition, saying to Zadok, "Carry back the ark of God into the city." He regarded the step they had taken as neither needful nor wise. It was needful neither for the ark's sake, nor his. If left behind, it would be perfectly safe. Absalom might seize upon his father's treasures, but would not dare to invade the sanctity of the tabernacle. Hence David's assurance, "If I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation." Should it be the divine will to bring him back to his palace and his crown, he knew he should find the sanctuary safe. There was a converse to the picture. "But if He thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold, here am **I,** let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him." Should it be the divine will to cast him down from regal dignity, the presence of the ark could not countervail the decree.

As his care was not indispensable to the preservation of the ark, so the ark of itself would be no guarantee of his security. His mind was fully made up. "The king said also unto Zadok the priest, Art not thou a seer? return unto the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz thy son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar: see, I will tarry in the plain of the wilderness, until there come word from you to certify me:" The royal behest was obeyed. "Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God again to Jerusalem; and they tarried there," while David, bare-headed and unshod, commenced the ascent of Olivet; whose summit reached, he "worshipped God," as from that spot he cast a parting gaze upon the place of Jehovah's sanctuary.

The kind action and intended service of the priests, though not accepted, were appreciated and remembered. The adhesion of Abiathar, in later years, to the interests of the rebel Adoniiah, could not be passed over as a light and trivial crime; but the sentence of death, to which, as guilty of treason, he stood exposed, was commuted into deposition from the sacerdotal office: "unto Abiathar the priest, said (Solomon) the king, Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields; for thou art worthy of death; but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted. So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the Lord."

So far as David was concerned, the incident at Kidron displayed an unusual strength of faith. In the words of the banished monarch, there was implied no undervaluing of the ark. We know that, during his exile, he had earnest longings after the privileges he had enjoyed in connection with it. "Oh God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land where no water is, to see *thy* power and *thy* glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." "My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and *appear before God?* When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me, for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday." "Oh, send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill and to thy tabernacles: then will I go unto the altar of God, *unto God* my exceeding joy; yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, Oh God my God." "As for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy, and in thy fear will I

worship *toward thy holy temple.* Nevertheless, much as he panted after Zion's ordinances, and ardently as he anticipated his return to the enjoyment of them, he had a firm confidence that God could answer prayer wherever it was offered. His faith was not in the ark, but in the God of the ark. Hence he could say, "I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and He heard me out of His holy hill:" for though far removed from the mercy-seat, yet the voice of his supplication had reached the ear of Him who there gave audience to his people's requests, Nay, more; David felt the truth of what he had expressed in one of the psalms of his youth: "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven." He knew that Jehovah's presence was circumscribed by the limits of no human habitation, that Jehovah was with him whithersoever he was driven. Though resident on earth, yet enthroned on high, the Omniscient One could draw near, in mercy and love, to succor and relieve his people, in any place, and under any circumstances.

Let us seek to cultivate a similar faith in the Omnipresence of our God. If we have learned to enjoy communion with Him in His house, let us nevertheless be prepared for such seasons of affliction as may bar us from the public means of grace. We may indulge the language of hope, and cheer ourselves with the thought, "If I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, if it please Him to restore me to health and strength, He will bring me there once more, He will show me His habitation yet again, and He will renew the communications of His grace." But at the same time, we must cherish the spirit of resignation, and be found ready to say, "If He shall have no delight in my return to His courts, if He shall see it necessary to prolong my sorrow, if He shall keep me still the prisoner of His providence, behold, here am I**,** let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him." Let us pant after the sanctuary, but let us not repine at our detention from it. Let us long to return, but let us be patient under God's restraining hand. And, in order to this, let us sympathize in David's assurance, and rest our minds on the great and glorious thought, that God's presence is universal, that He is not confined to temples made with hands, that He despises not the private abode of His meanest worshipper. Succeeding ages have demonstrated this truth, even more clearly than it could be known in the royal Psalmist's day. We can read the inspired page, and learn how Jonah's prayer was heard, when out of the fish's belly his "soul looked toward the holy temple;" how Daniel, in the land of captivity, "opened

his window toward Jerusalem," and "kneeled upon his knees and prayed;" and how, when thus he "set his face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications," there came forth an angelic messenger with an answer of peace. We turn to the Gospel narrative, and we find that Jesus wrought not all His miracles in the temple-court, or amid the throngs assembled at the Jewish feasts: in seclusion was the daughter of Jairus raised from the dead, and the sufferer at Decapolis was led "aside from the multitude," before his cure was effected. The risen Savior again and again appeared to the assembled company of His disciples, saying, "Peace be unto you;" but He also revealed Himself to the two at their evening meal, and to Mary Magdalene when alone in her grief. Our main desire should be to "see Jesus." If we willingly absent ourselves from public worship, or carelessly attend it, we shall miss the experience of His love. If we enter His courts, when duty requires us at home, or if, when compelled to tarry in our dwellings, we do so with rebellious, complaining hearts, He will not draw near to us with the revelations of His mercy. Let us wait upon Him, whether it be in public or in private; thus in solitary as well as in social worship, we shall realize His gracious presence.

Chapter 21 - The Ark on Mount Morriah; or, God's Presence Perpetual

THE ARK ON MOUNT MORRIAH;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE PERPETUAL.

THE close of David's life evinced the steadfastness of his veneration for the ark. Assembling the princes of Israel, he gave them a charge, saying, "Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God; arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the Lord God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the Lord." And in a yet larger convocation subsequently gathered, he commenced his address by an allusion to his favorite but frustrated project, "Hear me, my brethren, and my people: As for me, I had in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and for the footstool of our God." Then explaining to them that the work had been reserved for his successor, he delivered to Solomon "the pattern of all that he had by the spirit; a pattern of the porch, and of the houses, and of the treasuries, and of the upper chambers, and of the inner parlors, and of the place of the mercy-seat;" he also "gave of gold by weight for things of gold," and among them "for the pattern of the chariot of the cherubims that spread out their wings, and covered the ark of the covenant of the Lord."

The charge thus solemnly and publicly bequeathed, Solomon failed not to obey. A magnificent temple was erected on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared unto David, and where the site of the intended edifice had long been marked out. The building was fashioned after the plan of the tabernacle, though on a larger scale, with a court, for the people, and holy place for the priests, while the Holy of Holies was still reserved for the coffer which contained the tables of the law. "The oracle he prepared in the house within, to set there the ark of the covenant of the Lord." *1 Kings. vi. 19.* This inmost recess of the temple was "garnished with precious stones for beauty, and the gold was gold of Parvaim, six hundred talents." Here also were made two

additional cherubim, of gilded olive-wood, colossal in stature, being ten cubits (or about fifteen feet) in height, whose outspread wings filled the entire width of the most holy place, while the position of their faces, toward the interior of the chamber, marked that they were not set up as objects of adoration, but placed there as memorials of the adoration due to the Lord of hosts.

During the long years of preparation requisite for this great work, we are not left to imagine that the symbol of God's residence on earth was forgotten, or the appointed shrine of divine worship neglected. We know that the opening of Solomon's reign was marked by a special recognition of its value. When the Lord had appeared to him at Gibeon, in a dream by night, and had promised him the grant of that wise and understanding heart which he had chosen in preference to length of days, abundance of wealth, or assurance of conquest over his foes, "he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt-offerings, and offered peace offerings." He dreamed not that his projected temple would add any glory to that significant emblem; he knew well that the presence which that emblem betokened was what alone could give transcendent worth to the splendid fane he was about to rear.

At length the costly edifice was "finished throughout all the parts thereof, and according to all the fashion of it." Naught was wanting to its completion save the bringing in of its sacred contents. "Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion." And "all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark; and they brought up the ark, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and all the holy vessels that were in the tabernacle, these did the priests and the Levites bring up," Solomon and the people meanwhile sacrificing "sheep and oxen, which could not be told nor numbered for multitude." And "the priests brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord unto his place, to the oracle of the house, into the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubims" which Solomon had made. "For the cherubims spread forth their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubims covered the ark and the staves thereof above," thus overshadowing likewise the mercy-seat and the smaller cherubim of Moses. Having fixed the ark in its

appointed place, the priests "drew out the staves, that the ends of the staves were seen from the ark before the oracle, but they were not seen without;" thus partially drawn out, though not protruding beyond the veil, the poles marked (as Jewish writers tell us) the standing-place of the high priest, who took his station between them on the great day of atonement.

When the priests had retreated from the holy place, "the trumpeters and singers lifted up their voice, with the trumpets, and cymbals, and instruments of music, and praised the Lord,"---not improbably in the words of the hundred-and-thirty-second Psalm, which was evidently composed with a view to this occasion. It opens with a commemoration of the ark's past history. It tells how David had vowed to give no sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids, till he had "found a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." It records the necessity for such an act on David's part; "Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah," in the Ephraimite city, namely, of Shiloh; "we found it in the fields of the wood," literally, "in the regions of Jair," Jairim, or Kirjath-jearim. It invites the Divine presence and pleads the Divine promise, while it seeks a blessing for David's sake to rest on David's son. This would seem to have been followed by one or more of the Psalms which had been composed or chosen to celebrate the ark's removal to Zion; for we read, that it was when the stanza was reached, "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever," that "the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister, by reason of the cloud," but had to withdraw, as it would seem, to the temple-court, " for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God."

"Thus while the minstrels sang and played,

The mystic cloud of glory fell,

That shadowy light-that splendid shade

In which Jehovah pleased to dwell,"

The unwonted spectacle filled the beholders with awe; but Solomon reassured them with the words, "The Lord said that He would dwell in the thick darkness." That which appeared to them a terrific gloom, was only "dark with excess of brightness;" its appearance was a token of God's inhabitation of His temple, and its obscurity was a sign of God's merciful

consideration for the feebleness of man.

A personal and private dedication of the building to Jehovah's service was then made by the king: "I have surely built thee an house to dwell in, a settled place for thee to abide in forever." To the people he gave a succinct account of the origin and history of the erection, ending with the important statement,---"and in it have I put the ark, wherein is the covenant of the Lord, which He made with our fathers, when He brought them out of the land of Egypt." This marked it a national temple, set apart for the national worship of Israel's God. Then, kneeling on his elevated brazen platform, he "spread forth his hands toward heaven," and poured forth the ardent and comprehensive intercessions which characterized his public dedication prayer. Amazed, yet encouraged by the condescension of Him whom "the heaven and heaven of heavens" cannot contain, the suppliant monarch ventured to entreat, that every earnest and penitent request, breathed forth to the God of the temple, might win a ready and responsive interposition of heavenly aid. Not content with generalizing, the subject is laid down in detail. Seven illustrative cases are selected,---reference being made first to private wrongs, then to public defeat, to drought, to pestilence, to military enterprise, and to possible captivity, while even the stranger from a far country had his name enrolled upon the list. In almost all these supposed instances, the same ideas substantially recur, though in language beautifully and expressively varied. The aptitude of man's heart to sin,---the connection between sin and sorrow the design of sorrow in leading to repentance---the genuineness of repentance as evinced in confession, reformation, and entreaty---and the presentation of that entreaty toward the temple,---are as so many threads inwoven and more or less apparent in the tissue of each. The petitions also run parallel:---hear---forgive---and help. After the outpouring of this prayer, Solomon recited part of the hymn already sung: "Now therefore arise, Oh Lord God, into thy resting place, thou, and the ark of thy strength; let thy priests, Oh Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness: Oh Lord God, turn not away the face of thine anointed: remember the mercies of David thy servant!" Then he pronounced a parting benediction on the assembly; and thenceforward, their first sacrifices having been accepted by fire from heaven, the ordinary routine of temple-service commenced, with this only deviation, that in consequence of the vast multitude now collected,

and the special offerings which they presented, the large brazen altar proved insufficient, and it became needful to hallow for the occasion "the middle of the court that was before the Lord's house," temporary altars being reared for the sudden emergency. The feast of dedication was prolonged from the eighth to the fifteenth day of the month, and during the course of it was observed the "day of atonement," when the high-priest (Zadok if still alive,---if otherwise, Ahimaaz his son) had to enter the inner house alone, and stand with his waving and fuming censer before the sacred ark. On the fifteenth day, the week's feast of tabernacles commenced; and thus it was after the protracted solemnities of a full fortnight, that on the three-and-twentieth day of the month the people were "sent away into their tents, joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had done for David his servant and for Israel his people."

There is one point, on which we may do well to concentrate our attention. We refer to the petition which Solomon thus repeated: "Have respect unto the prayer of thy servant, that thine eyes may be open toward this house night and day;"---"and let these my words wherewith I have made supplication before the Lord be nigh unto the Lord our God day and night, that He maintain I the cause of his servant and the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require." In strict accordance with this, was the answer graciously bestowed: "The Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this house to myself for a house of sacrifice; and mine eyes and my heart shall be there perpetually." Not at stated seasons only, not at worship hours alone, was prayer to find acceptance at the mercy-seat. It is true, that we have instances in Scripture of remarkable events which specially signalized the appointed time of evening-sacrifice; but it was not solely then that a blessing could be dispensed. At every hour, and by night as well as by day, was audience to be given. He that keepeth Israel, would neither slumber nor sleep. And thus it is still. Needful it is for earthly potentates to limit their reception hours; but the King of kings knows no such necessity. Fatigue can never dull His ear, or paralyze His arm. At any and at every moment, the earnest heart is welcome at his footstool. Nehemiah acted on the knowledge of this; so did Heman the Ezrahite ; so did the widowed Anna; so did the Apostle Paul; and so do the elect of God, "which cry day and night unto him." Such liberty of constant

access to God is an unspeakable advantage. To be permitted an approach to His throne at rare and distant intervals---to be granted one day in the week, or one hour in the day, wherein to spread our case before Him---to be able to present at His feet a long list of petitions, and to lay in a store of grace to meet our foreseen exigencies---this were much! But how much more is it, to have access as frequent as our necessities---to go with each separate want, as it first arises---to take to Him, as the margin reads it, "the thing of a day in his day"---to be under no necessity of keeping one single anxious thought pent up within to corrode our peace and to canker our spirits---to have free opportunity of giving immediate vent to our surcharged hearts, by an instant rolling of the burden on Him who careth for us! Such is the amazing privilege accorded. It were well, if we availed ourselves of it aright. Why do we go mourning, why are we bowed down with heaviness? Is it not, because "the grass has grown over our path to the bush"? Is it not, because we are waiting for the Sabbath's return, or for some "time of refreshing," or for some special call to the throne of grace, instead of going again and again, as occasion may require? And shall it evermore be thus? Shall we continue to groan beneath a load of which we might at once be lightened? Are the divine eye and ear "attent unto the prayer of His people night and day"? and shall we wait the live-long day till the time of evening devotion arrive, or wet our pillow with tears at night till the season for our matin-supplications shall have come? For all who are in Christ, for all who come to Christ, for all who plead the name of Christ, the golden scepter is forever stretched out. There needs no three days' preparation, like that of Esther before she ventured into the presence of Ahasuerus,---no concerted fast---no putting on of costly apparel---no standing afar off in uncertainty---no waiting for a token of favor. There needs only the contrite heart that feels its destitution, the earnest heart that craves a blessing, the believing heart that will, with holy boldness, step forward to prefer its petition and request. Frequency of prayer here will be the best training for incessancy of praise above. A sense of God's perpetual presence on earth is the best preparation for the full enjoyment of His eternal presence in the world to come.

Chapter 22 - The Ark Lost; or, God's Presence Foreited

THE ARK LOST;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE FORFEITED.

THE notices of the ark, and even t the mere allusions to it, during its continuance of above four hundred years in the temple, are no more than occasional and scanty. Although Solomon had been warned, that the glory of his magnificent erection could consist only with the obedience of the worshippers,---although the threatening had gone forth, "If ye shall at all turn from following me, ye or your children, and will not keep my commandments and my statutes, which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them, and this house which I have hallowed for my name will I cast out of my sight,"---yet in his old age he was himself chargeable with rebellion against Jehovah. Not in his day, however, nor for a long time after, was "the holy and beautiful house burned up with fire," and its "pleasant things laid waste." In Solomon's case we may observe, that amid all his declension, he went not to the full length of some among his successors in forgetfulness of what that temple contained most precious and most sacred. So far did he carry his veneration for the ark, that he respected even the site which it had previously occupied; for "he brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for her; for he said, "My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the Lord hath come." Better would it have been, if he had carried out the idea to a fuller extent, and had felt that every place in God's earth was too sacred to permit the forming of an idolatrous connection.

After the death of Solomon, the rending of the kingdom was not unconnected with the history of the ark. It was the temple which exalted Jerusalem to the ecclesiastical, as the palace raised it to the civil supremacy, as metropolis of

Canaan; and to Jeroboam, as a native of Zereda, this was especially galling. He knew that with his tribe---that, namely, of Ephraim---the ark had once found a home; and he grudged to Mount Moriah the constant gathering of the people at the great yearly festivals. Hence, on establishing a rival throne at Shechem, it was his policy to set up at Bethel and at Dan a rival worship, by the construction of two golden calves; and a rival priesthood, by the admission to sacerdotal functions of men belonging to any tribe, if only they sanctified themselves according to the prescribed mode of Aaronic consecration. The Levites consequently "left their suburbs and possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem, and after them out of all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came to Jerusalem to sacrifice unto the Lord God of their fathers." The page of Israel's history thenceforth bore the dark traces of idolatry, impiety, and crime; while to Judah's chronicles we must turn for the further narrative of the ark. The temple annals form a checkered scene. Often were gold and silver taken from it by the strong arm of the invader, or by the rapacious grasp of some impious prince, or by the trembling hand of some poor and timorous monarch who could not, from his own exchequer, defray the tribute of the oppressor or the purchase price of peace. But never was the sacred ark endangered, so long as the temple itself stood. He who continued to make the latter the scene of His residence, continued to make the former the object of His care.

We are not sure but that the ark may have been carried out against the enemy on the memorable occasion of Jehoshaphat's expedition against the confederate armies of Moab and Ammon. The circumstances of the whole case were peculiar. The express design of the foe was to take "the houses of God into possession; and the men of Judah were told by a message from heaven, "the battle is not yours, but God's; ye shall not need to fight in this battle; set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you, Oh Judah and Jerusalem." Among the Levites present on this occasion, the Kohathites are instinctly mentioned. The procession was strictly religious, and not military. When the order of march was set in array, singers were appointed unto the Lord, "that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth forever." On arriving at the watchtower, the hostile army was found utterly destroyed. Three days were spent in gathering the spoil, and the fourth in

solemn thanksgiving; for "there they blessed the Lord," instead of adjourning to His sanctuary, as---for a public service---we should have expected. Then they returned, "and they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the Lord"---as though it might have been to bring back that which had been the pledge of their victory in the wilderness, and the shrine of their worship in the valley of Berachah. This, however, is not susceptible of more definite proof; and we therefore pass on.

Many a king there was who neglected the ark, like Ahaz, who "shut up the doors of the house of the Lord;" but there were seasons of revival, when rulers, like Hezekiah, would go up into the temple, and spread a letter "before the Lord," and direct a prayer to Him who dwelt" between the cherubims." The measure of the people's iniquity seemed almost full, when the daring hand of Manasseh set up a graven image in the house of the Lord; but a parting gleam of sunlight streaked the horizon, when Josiah showed himself zealous for the Lord, repaired and purified the temple, re-established the passover-feast, and "said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the Lord, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders." The cause of this precept we cannot now ascertain; but it evidently implies that, for a greater or less space of time, the ark---having been removed from the Holy of Holies, probably on account of the temple-profanation committed by preceding kings---had been carried about from place to place by the sons of Kohath. Very brief was the period during which it again occupied the Most Holy. Two successive inroads, made by the king of Babylon, were premonitions of the final overthrow which awaited the city and the temple. **In** the meanwhile, prophets lifted up their voice of warning.

Jeremiah spoke to the men of Jerusalem in the name of the Lord, and said, "Because ye have done all these works, therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, as I have done to Shiloh." And Ezekiel, among the captives by the river of Chebar, had a prophetic vision, wherein he saw the profanation of the holy courts---the insult paid to the ark by the fire worshippers, who turned their back upon it that they might do homage to the rising sun---the removal of the Shechinah-cloud from the inner sanctuary to the threshold, from the threshold to the eastern gate, and from the midst of the city to the Mount of Olives, lingering, in sign of unwillingness to depart,

yet moving further and further in token that the judgment was inevitable. At length the set time came; the temple was given over to destruction; and the ark thenceforward disappeared. The Divine presence having been removed, the symbol had become valueless. And hence we are told that "the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not His footstool in the day of His anger!" Well might the exiles take up the strain of lamentation: "Thou seest that our sanctuary is laid waste, our altar broken down, our temple destroyed, our psaltery is laid on the ground, our song is put to silence, our rejoicing is at an end, the light of our candlestick is put out, the ark of our covenant is spoiled." *2 Esdras x. 21, 22.*

The question here arises, Are we in any danger of incurring Israel's doom, and forfeiting the presence of our God? We are at no loss to give a reply. However strong may be our views of final perseverance, however firmly we may be convinced that He who has begun a good work will carry it on, still, with Scripture for our guide, we cannot deny that there is peril. If there can be no falling away from grace, yet there may be apostasy from the profession of the truth. And it becomes us to ponder those accents of warning which show how much intellectual apprehension there may be of the Divine presence, which may prove but evanescent and delusive, in the case of those who too confidently boast, "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we!" It should arouse us to "stand in awe, and sin not," when we read the solemn cautions of the inspired page: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance." Such a monition is given by the apostle even to those of whom he writes, "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." Without, therefore, perverting these words by giving way to discouragement or distrust, let us turn them to the designed account, and let us "show diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end." Whenever Jesus draws near, let our prayer be, "Abide with

us;" and let us sedulously watch against whatsoever might constrain Him to depart.

Chapter 23 - The Ark Unrestored; or, God's Presence in Human Form

THE ARK UNRESTORED;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE IN HUMAN FORM.

THE destruction of the lost ark has not been believed in by the Jews themselves. They have various fables concerning it. Some have maintained that Solomon, having foreseen or been forewarned of the temple's destruction, had caused a secret vault to be prepared; and that here, on Huldah's announcement of the impending ruin, the coffer was hidden by King Josiah, whose injunction to the Levites *[2 Chron.xxxv. 3.]* is thus explained as referring not to the ark's restoration to its accustomed place, but to its secretion in this subterranean recess, that it might there be secured against the enemy's cupidity. A different story of its concealment is given in the Apocrypha: "It was also contained in the same writing, that the prophet, being warned of God, commanded the tabernacle and the ark to go with him, as he went forth into the mountain where Moses climbed up, and saw the heritage of God: and when Jeremy came thither, he found an hollow cave, wherein he laid the tabernacle, and, the ark, and the altar of incense, and so stopped the door: and some of those that followed him came to mark the way, but they could not find it: which, when Jeremy perceived, he blamed them, saying, As for that place, it shall be unknown until the time that God gather his people again together, and receive them unto mercy: then shall the Lord show them these things, and the glory of the Lord shall appear, and the cloud also, as it was showed under Moses, and as when Solomon desired that the place might be honorably sanctified." *2 Macc. ii. 4-8.* This story, which has gained credit even among some of the Christian Fathers, has been variously enlarged, particularly in the version given by Epiphanius. We are told, that on the stone which he placed at the entrance of the cave, Jeremiah inscribed the Divine name with his finger, and that the impression remained as indelible as though engraved with iron; that it was then concealed from view by a cloud;

that the place of its concealment was in the vicinity of Moses and Aaron's grave; that in the resurrection, the ark will rise first, and break through the stone, and be placed on Mount Sinai; that Moses will set it open, and Aaron disclose the tables of the law; that to this, as a center, shall congregate all the saints; and that hither all who are waiting for the Lord shall flee, from before the rage of the infuriated enemy.

These statements are manifestly such as will fail to commend themselves to a sober judgment. The most reasonable hypothesis is that which considers the ark to have been destroyed, when Nebuzar-adan, captain of the guard to the Babylonian monarch, "burned the house of God, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof." *2 Chron. xxxvi. 19.* That the ark was included among the articles here referred to, we fully believe. Other vessels were carried to Babylon, and the greater part of them afterwards restored; but we search in vain through the list for any notice of the holy ark of God. Witsius, though inclined to this view, finds a difficulty in the question, How came it that the most precious of the temple's golden vessels should be burned, while the inferior were secured and carried away? He tries to account for this, on the supposition that the Chaldeans might have been dissuaded from its capture by the tradition of the Philistines' misfortunes, and by the consequent fear that they could not take it without danger to themselves. We imagine, however, that a simpler explanation is found in the idea that they regarded it as the god of the Israelites, and therefore burned it with fire, as heathen victors were commonly wont to destroy the idols which their antagonists adored. *2 Kings xix. 17, 18.*

But whatever may have been the actual fate of the ark, Jews and Christians are alike agreed that it has never been restored. After a seventy years' captivity, the Jews returned with leave to re-inhabit their city, and rebuild their sanctuary. But the ancient ark was wanting, and no Divine command was given for the construction of a new one. Even those who understand Ezekiel's prophetic vision of a restored temple as a literal prediction of that built by the exiles on their return to Palestine, cannot find amid its minute details any distinct mention of "the testimony." Of doors and windows, chambers and galleries, porches and posts, altars and tables, he gives a precise account; but concerning the ark he is silent. Once, indeed, he states that the Divine messenger said, "Son of man, the place of my throne, and *the*

place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel, shall they no more defile;" but to interpret this phrase literally of an ark or "footstool," such as had been in the former temple, would not comport with the figurative sense in which (if this applies to the past) we must necessarily understand the previous reference to the return of that glory-cloud which had once filled the house. Whether the Holiest of all was left vacant, save (as some tell us) a large stone to mark the site over which the cherubim had once spread their overshadowing wings,---or whether (as others affirm) an ark was placed there, similar in form and dimensions, but unlike in its contents and in its honors, to that of Moses,---is uncertain. To this day, the Jews have in their synagogues an *aron*, or coffer, in which is deposited a copy of the law; but this proves nothing definitive as to the preparation of any such for the second temple. What has been regarded by some as a representation of the ark, on the triumphal arch of Titus, is more satisfactorily considered as having been meant for a figure of the table of showbread. Profane history tells us of a new incense-altar, a new candlestick of gold, and a new showbread-table, but of no new ark. The founding of Zerubbabel's temple was celebrated with mingled joy and grief: "all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice." They knew that much would there be lacking, which the skill of man was inadequate to supply. Five "choice things" are numbered by the Rabbis as having been missed; viz., "the ark and mercy-seat-the Divine presence, or visible glory of the Shechinah---the holy fire on the altar---the Urim and Thummim---and the spirit of prophecy." It is observable that there was a different sentiment pervading the minds of the people when they met again for the dedication of the house, which they are said to have observed" with joy;" and the assuagement of their former grief is to be accounted for by their believing reception of the encouraging messages sent to them through the teachings of the prophets. Zechariah had lifted up his voice: "Thus saith the Lord; *I am returned* unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem;" and Haggai had been commissioned to declare, " The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former."

The Jewish nation still looks for the discovery of the Sinaitic ark, and believe

it to be one of the blessings which their expected Messiah is to confer. Did they search their own oracles with an unprejudiced heart, they might read differently. Isaiah foretold that in gospel times the temple at Jerusalem should no more be required for the display of God's presence, nor that shrine be needful which had told of its local manifestation: " Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?" Still more express were the words of Jeremiah: "It shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done *(or, made)* any- more." *Jer. Iii. 16.* Here, in five reiterated clauses, is it distinctly stated, that under the Christian economy no such restoration should be made, evidently because no such restoration should be needful. The absence of the ark in our day, rightly understood, so far from teaching that Messiah has never yet come, is the most indubitable proof that His first advent is already past.

Son of the daughter of Jerusalem,

Thou art Christ's witness, though thou know'st it not:

Where's thy high priest with rich symbolic gem?

Where is thy temple? Canst thou point the spot?

Where stood the ark---the mercy-seat---the pot

That held the manna? An oblivious blot

Effaces the long records of the whole,

And falsifies the hope of thy deceived soul."

It is one characteristic of the Divine works, that they answer multiform ends. In the instance before us, we may perceive that the loss or destruction of the ark, while it fulfilled the intent of punishment upon the disobedient nation who had violated the covenant of their God, was designed to work another and a happier result. Here, as elsewhere, good was brought out of evil. It was Jehovah's purpose that, as the tabernacle had given place to the temple, so the latter should give way to One greater than itself. The fullness of time was nigh at hand, and it was desirable that the weaning process should begin, The

ark of God's presence removed and unrestored, there was more likelihood that "the Angel of His presence" should be owned and welcomed.

The ark had been granted as a stepping-stone from idolatry, and now its loss was to be a stepping-stone from Judaism. Of idol-worship the Hebrew nation had been permanently cured during their banishment to Chaldea; they were prepared to understand, better than at any former stage of their national history, the pure spirituality of the God they served. But this abstract notion would not suffice for all men. The human heart would recoil with affright at the thought of a Being seemingly so far removed from the comprehension of its endurances and its emotions. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; for verily He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took au Him the seed of Abraham: wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest;" and "in that He hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted." God was "made manifest in the flesh." The Son of God appeared on earth, as "Emmanuel, God with us." The Eternal Word "became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." Being in the form of God, and thinking it no robbery to be equal with God, He was yet made in the likeness of men. The Shechinah was gone, but the Divine presence was still embodied. The Ark of the covenant was lost, but the Messenger of the covenant came in its stead. The second temple was greater than the first; for in it the Lord Himself suddenly appeared. "That which decayeth and waxeth old" might well "vanish away, that those things which cannot be shaken, might remain." We envy not the ancient Israelite his sacred possessions, nor the modern Jew his cherished but fallacious hopes; for it is Ours to be made partakers of "the glory that excelleth." Though no holy fire descends from heaven in our sight, though no darkly luminous cloud hangs before us to overshroud the presence of the Almighty, though no breastplate glitters with translucent gems, though no voice of inspiration supplies an audible answer to our questionings, yet have we more cause than any ever had to sing the never-ending anthem," Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever! "From age to age we shall find the strain exhaustless:

. . . . . *"Godhead veil'd*

In Christhood, Christhood in humanity,
To work out man's redemption! the big theme
Shall furnish still for song height above height.
Depth beneath depth, expanse beyond expanse."

Chapter 24 - The Ark Seen in Vision; or, God's Presence with His Church

THE ARK SEEN IN VISION;

OR,

GOD'S PRESENCE WITH HIS CHURCH.

ONCE only is the ark again mentioned in the sacred canon. The passage occurs amid the wondrous statements of the Apocalypse. "The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail." *Rev. xi. 19.* It is unquestionable that this language is wholly figurative. We are no more to understand that the seer literally beheld a material temple, and the literal Mosaic ark, than that he gazed on actual monsters, with real horns and crowns. The expressions are altogether symbolical; and the imagery is borrowed from the old Levitical institutes, of which John from his youth had been accustomed to hear.

We are not about now to attempt any critical exposition of a verse that stands forth to our view in the midst of a sacred treatise so confessedly obscure. Instead of bewildering ourselves with the conflicting statements of commentators, it will be our aim simply to extract the general principles, which all admit to be enwrapped in the few words under our notice. To whatever precise epoch or event they apply, the general outline of their meaning, and the truth they teach, are clearly perceptible. Assuming what is generally conceded, that by "the temple of God" is understood His church, (that is to say, the Christian church---for the veil is rent, and the interior of the edifice open to the view,) and applying to the "ark of the testament" that symbolic meaning which we have kept constantly before us,---we are presented with the idea of *God's presence in His church;* and, in connection with it, we read of "lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail," emblems of the judgments which God has in store for the enemies of that church. In accordance with this, we read in the immediate context, "We give thee thanks, Oh Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come, because thou hast taken to thee thy great power,

and hast reigned;" *Rev. xi. 17.* and again, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ." *Rev. xii. 10.* The same emblematic scene is kept up through the ensuing descriptions, and still teaches the same fundamental truth, of which the vision's minor details are but the developments and illustrations. "And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened: and the temple was filled with smoke from THE GLORY of God and from His power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled. And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. Whatever the idea we attach to each several plague, we are at no loss to understand the whole as a succession of judgments that should overtake the adversaries of God, the opponents of His truth, and the oppressors of His people.

It would be easy, though here it would be out of place, to follow the thread of church history as it winds along the mazes of the past, and to find, step by step, as we trace the clue, how every weapon formed against the spiritual Zion has failed to prosper---nay, has often been made to fall back upon those who devised and wielded it. The God of the ark is still in the midst of His people. His ear is not heavy, that it cannot hear; nor His arm shortened, that it cannot save. As in the ancient days, as in the years of old, when He arises, His enemies are scattered, and they that hate Him flee before Him. What has been well said of our own country may be proved, with a yet wider range of illustration, in reference to the church of Christ,---"While God was so conspicuous in her history in the light of the blessings which He showered down, His presence was also singularly transparent in the judgments which, like chartered emissaries, walked the world around." The lightning flash may have glared fearfully upon the eye, the thunder-peal reverberated solemnly upon the ear, the earthquake-throe have paled the cheek, the devastating hail have struck terror into the heart, and the portentous voices filled the soul with apprehension; but no harm could betide the celestial edifice, no judgment reach the sealed ones. Not against them, but in their behalf, were these glittering tokens displayed, these deadly vials outpoured, these desolating plagues sent forth. From time to time, the godly have had to suffer in the defense of the faith. But to them the stake has been as a chariot of fire in

which to take their homeward flight, and the block has been as the threshold of heaven; while "the blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the church." Neither to Christian individuals nor to Christian communities does persecution (truly so called) come as a judgment. Man may design it as such; but in the hand of God the curse is turned into a blessing; and by the decree of God the persecutor only draws down sure vengeance on himself. The forked arrows of God's wrath are not for His people, but for His foes. The temple is safe, because in it is the presence of Him who commissions and controls each flying dart.

Reader, gaze awhile at the temple-vision, and realize its various accompaniments. Listen to the sights and sounds that portend "destruction from the presence of the Lord." Even now "His judgments are in the earth;" but you may yet "learn righteousness." One day it may be too late. When the last trump shall sound---when the sign of the Son of man shall appear in heaven "as the lightning that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven shineth unto the other part"---when "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up"---when the voice of the Judge is heard upon the great white throne pronouncing your final doom, then will your lot be irrevocable. Not so at present. Look again at that temple of God: it is "opened,"---opened as an asylum wherein you may be safe. Remain without, and you perish. Enter in, and you will be eternally secure. Can you hesitate? Why, oh! why do you stand aloof? That ark is indeed the symbol of God's presence---His presence, whom you have deeply and daily offended by your neglect and disobedience. But forget not that a sacrifice has been offered, an atonement made. Look to Christ as the Lamb of God, and your sins shall be forgiven. Look to Christ as the Savior, and banish your distrustful fears. Look to Christ as your Intercessor, for through Him you may have access by the Spirit even unto the Father. Hasten to take refuge beside the horns of the altar; then shall the ark of God's strength, the glory of His presence, be to you, not the radiating point of fiery indignation, but the pledge of your present safety and your future triumph.

FINIS.